

IN THE NEWS

Iran offers Palestinians funding

Iran reportedly pledged to donate \$250 million to the Palestinian Authority.

The London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat reported Tuesday that Tehran made the offer to offset Palestinian Authority funding that was lost following Hamas' election victory.

White House names new Jewish liaison

The son of the chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has been chosen as the new White House liaison to the Jewish community.

Jay Zeidman, 22, has been working in the White House Office of Public Liaison since last summer, and will be taking over the Jewish portfolio, sources told JTA. He coordinated a meeting with Jewish leaders at the White House last week.

Jeffrey Berkowitz, who became the White House Jewish liaison last year, will now focus on his main job in the presidential scheduling office.

Zeidman's father is Fred Zeidman, a Houston friend of President Bush who was named chairman of the museum in 2002 and led fund-raising in the Jewish community for Bush's re-election.

AIPAC donors to ask questions

Top donors to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee will have an opportunity to quiz its leadership and lawyers on Saturday night about the classified-information case against two former staffers.

Several donors have asked AIPAC to explain its decision in recent months to limit funding for the defense of Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, facing trial in April for allegedly receiving and distributing classified information about Iran to an Israeli diplomat, a journalist and to fellow AIPAC staffers.

The defendants rejected AIPAC's most recent funding offer.



WORLD REPORT

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With Kadima still out in front, Labor and Likud target Olmert

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With Israeli elections now just a month away, the leaders of the three main parties are under mounting pressure.

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Kadima, well ahead in his bid for re-election, has become the target of vicious campaigns by Labor and Likud.

As they continue to trail badly in the polls, there are rumblings in both Likud and Labor about replacing their prime-ministerial candidates, Benjamin Netanyahu and Amir Peretz, before the March 28 vote.

Olmert, who became prime minister because of Ariel Sharon's debilitating stroke earlier this year, has been singled out by the rival parties as Kadima's weak underbelly.

The Likud is attacking him as inexperienced and irresolute in the face of the fundamentalist threat posed by Hamas and Iran.

Likud copywriters have dubbed him "Smolmert," a play on his name and the Hebrew word for left wing, and argue that with him at the helm, Israelis cannot feel safe.

■
Labor is attacking what it alleges as Olmert's corruption.

Labor campaign ads highlight the acting prime minister's expensive tastes, and imply that although he has never been convicted, standards of public conduct disqualify him from high office.

A spate of recent newspaper articles has been fueling the Labor campaign.

A seven-page spread in the Ha'aretz weekend magazine, entitled "With a Little Help From His Friends," accuses Olmert of being soft on party activists who have broken the law, of having rich donor-friends and of skirting the bounds of legality himself on more than one occasion.

It highlights a case that goes back to the 1988 elections in which Olmert was the Likud's election treasurer and the party employed a system of covering up illegal donations by providing donors with receipts for services never rendered.

Olmert was indicted, but claimed he had only been responsible for donations abroad, and in 1997 was acquitted of any wrongdoing.

The article fails to pin on Olmert any actual violation of the law, but paints a picture of a smooth operator stretching legality to its limits.

Two more recent allegations could have greater impact.

Olmert is accused of conducting a fictitious arbitration between the Betar Jerusalem football club and one of its top administrators, enabling the administrator to keep \$1.1 million he said the club owed him.

Olmert, according to the allegations, signed the arbitration deal without checking any of the facts or whether other creditors should have had priority.

■
There are also questions about the sale of Olmert's Jerusalem home to American billionaire S. Daniel Abraham, a Middle East peace activist and donor to Olmert's political campaigns.

Continued on page 2

**ISRAELI
ELECTION
COUNTDOWN**

■ Labor and Likud are trying to chip away at Olmert's reputation and lead

Continued from page 1

Was the price of \$2.69 million too high, and a means of camouflaging a huge political donation? And is the rent the Olmerts are paying to Abraham, \$2,250 a month, to stay on while their new house is being renovated, too low, and tantamount to another illegal gift? Jerusalem estate agents are unanimous about the house price being fair, but most think the rent is too low.

If so, the question is whether the figure was reached in a genuine business negotiation or was it part of a deliberate kickback?

State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss was expected to issue an opinion this week.

Kadima strategists say if, as seems likely, Lindenstrauss finds no wrongdoing, the corruption campaign could boomerang and actually help Olmert's cause.

Indeed, so far there is no indication that either the Likud or the Labor anti-Olmert campaign is having any effect.

Weekend polls show Kadima for the 7th week running with around 40 of the 120 Knesset seats, Labor with 20 and Likud with 15.

Those figures are exacerbating

tensions in both the Likud and Labor camps.

Internal polls in the Likud show that the party would win two more seats with former foreign minister Silvan Shalom as leader instead of Netanyahu.

This has led to some still-underground calls for a switch in the leadership before the election. That is highly unlikely.

But if the Likud under Netanyahu gets less than 20 seats, Shalom will almost certainly

challenge him as soon as the post-election dust settles.

In the meantime Netanyahu is considering one last desperate throw of the dice — drastically curbing the power of the Likud Central Committee.

Considered the most despised body in Israeli politics, the Central Committee has the power to elect and influence the party's Knesset members.

If Netanyahu succeeds, his polls show the Likud would get another six seats.

Other polls, however, show a gain of only one.

If he fails and the committee retains its power, the Likud could crash to single figures.

Amir Peretz is similarly under pressure in Labor. Many in the party believe

its relatively poor showing stems from his failure to come across as a genuine prime ministerial candidate.

Moshe Shachal, a former Labor Cabinet minister, said so openly over the weekend: "I may not vote Labor; I have no confidence in Amir Peretz," Shachal told Ha'aretz.

There is talk in Labor of Ofir Pines-Paz or Avishai Braverman possibly replacing Peretz before the election.

Again this is unlikely but almost certainly presages a leadership struggle as soon as the election is over.

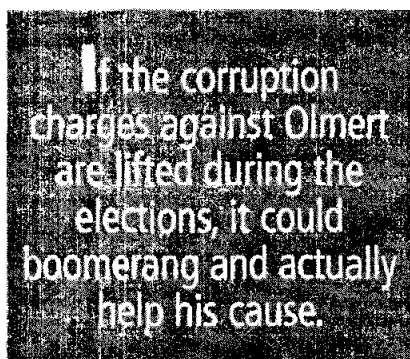
In their desperation, some in Likud and Labor are talking about a possible coalition that would include them, the far right wing and the religious parties to keep Kadima out of office.

The hope is that as an opposition party, Kadima, only founded recently by Sharon as a centrist alternative, would unravel.

But for Labor to join forces with Likud and the right in that way would be anathema to most of its leaders, especially Amir Peretz, who seems to rule it out.

On the contrary, if an election day approaches there is no change in the polls, a more likely scenario will be for Labor and Likud to vie over which of them will join a Kadima-led coalition.

The two parties will likely tell voters that they need to be the second-biggest party to be sure of a place in the coalition, and to have as many seats as possible to have real influence on the new government's direction.



Sides agree on more to end genocide

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The chairmen of the Republican and Democratic parties emphasized the need to do more to end the genocide in Sudan.

In separate speeches before the Jewish Council for Public Affairs on Tuesday, the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Ken Mehlman, called for a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Sudan, while his Democratic counterpart, Howard Dean, commended JCPA leaders for urging the Bush administration to do more to stop the government-sponsored massacres.

In his speech, Mehlman reflected on the campaign against terrorism, and stressed action against Iraq was neces-

sary to eliminate a terrorist threat.

"In a world where 19 armed men with nothing but box cutters could in a matter of minutes kill 3,000, could we allow a man who had done all of this, a man whose hatred of the United States and whose lust for power was unabated, continue to plot," he said of Saddam Hussein.

Dean said he would work to ensure religious proselytization "will not become the domain of the government of the United States." Both men stressed the United States should not recognize a Hamas-led Palestinian government, and said more needed to be done to contain the Iranian nuclear threat.

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Ad campaign targets Ethiopian-Israeli image

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — The sound of lilting music grows louder as the camera zooms in on a face in shadow. In the corner of the television screen the person's statistics are flashed: age 25, lawyer, represents Israel abroad.

A light is then cast onto the face, revealing a young Ethiopian Israeli woman wearing a business suit. In accentless Hebrew she says with a hint of defiance: "You did not expect to see me, did you? There are many others like me."

The same format is used to highlight other Ethiopian Israelis, including a soccer star, a deputy battalion commander in the army and a recent PhD.

The ad is part of a campaign launched by the Israeli Ministry of Immigration Absorption and the Jewish Agency for Israel to boost the image of the country's 100,000 Ethiopians. In the eyes of many Israelis, Ethiopian immigration to Israel has been a failure. Most encounter Ethiopians through the media, where they are depicted as unemployed, poor and plagued by family violence. The younger generation is seen as adrift and drawn increasingly to a life of crime.

The campaign aims to show the Israeli public young Ethiopians who have found success such as Maj. Shlomi Vicha, 27, a company commander in the Israeli army. In charge of three combat platoons, Vicha said he feels it is now his time to give back to the country that took him in as a young child who immigrated without his parents — and housed and educated him and his siblings.

"I have no doubt that the army is the best place for having an equal chance for success just like everyone else," Vicha added. "Everyone is equal here and whoever wants to succeed will succeed."

He has spent time speaking to Ethiopian youth. "I do what I can to contribute and explain to them about the army and how they can contribute," he said. "It's important that there are success stories so the public at large will see the other side and also so there can be models for the schoolchildren so they know that they too can succeed and go forward."

The statistics, however, are discouraging. Research conducted by the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews has found that among those who are employed, the

majority work in blue-collar jobs and live below the poverty line, Ethiopian students drop out of high school at twice the rate of the general population and juvenile crime is rampant.

The aggressive advertising campaign, being promoted on television, radio, the Internet and in newspapers, is aimed at casting a positive light on the community by focusing on its success stories. It also marks the anniversary of the first major arrival of Ethiopian Jews to Israel 30 years ago.

"We've decided we need to make an overture to the public, to include the public in their absorption," said Jewish Agency spokesman Yarden Vatikay. He said that he hopes the campaign, entitled, "Thirty Years Since the Aliyah from Ethiopia — Success Depends on Us" will boost awareness about the community and draft Israeli volunteers to help integrate Ethiopians more completely into Israeli society.

Integration has been the major stumbling block for the community. The majority arrived penniless, unable to speak Hebrew — and complete foreigners not only to Israeli culture but to the modern, Western world. Most had been raised in an agricultural, subsistence economy and were not all prepared for life in Israel.

Unlike their highly educated Russian immigrant counterparts, the Ethiopians have struggled to integrate into the competitive and aggressive spirit of Israeli culture and many are now dependent on government assistance.

A phone number is provided in the ads for a hotline that gives information on how Israelis can either "adopt" an Ethiopian family — sharing meals and holidays with them — tutor students or give an internship to a young Ethiopian.

Daniel Yosef, a 35-year-old architect, is among those in his generation of young Ethiopians who have found professional success. His siblings have as well: among them are a musician, a graphic artist and a fashion designer.

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

Yosef said he hopes the campaign accomplishes its goal of showing "the other side, the side of success within the community." But he added that what is most important to him is to boost awareness among today's Ethiopian youth that success is within reach.

"The campaign is one that has to be within our own society so we can raise our own self-image," he said. "we need to provide a good example to the youth."

Employment remains a problem. Only some 76 percent of the community is employed, compared with almost 90 percent of the general workforce. Meanwhile, thousands of Ethiopian Israelis who have graduated from college cannot find work in their fields. Many Ethiopians with law degrees, for example, can be found working in communal organizations or even as security guards instead of in law firms. Only some 15 percent of those with law degrees actually work in law firms, according

to Jewish Agency statistics.

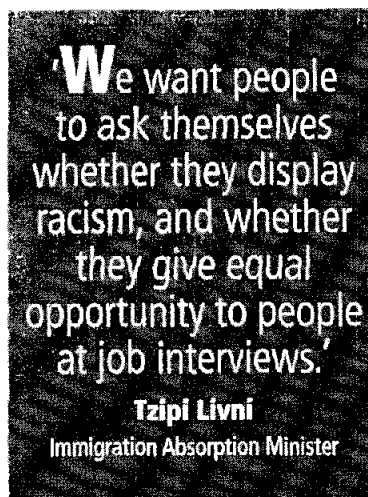
An estimated 60 percent of Ethiopian Israelis who have academic degrees end up taking working-class jobs when they cannot find work in their professions, research has found.

"The campaign is not the solution to the problem, but part of the process. We want people to ask themselves whether they display racism, and whether they give equal opportunity to people at job interviews, or are they influenced by stereotypes," Immigration Absorption Minister Tzipi Livni told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

Despite the initial jubilation in the country during the airlifts of Operation Moses in 1984-85 and Operation Solomon in 1991, racism and discrimination persist. In September, an Israeli mayor tried to bar Ethiopian students from attending an elementary school in his town.

Vicha, the army major, thinks the situation for Ethiopians will improve when the younger Ethiopians feel less stuck between cultures and embrace what is good in both Israeli society and their heritage.

"We need to take from both," he said. ■



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Leaders want murder in France condemned

Jewish leaders are calling on U.S. lawmakers to condemn the murder of a French Jew.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations has asked the legislators to introduce a resolution condemning the attack, and have also approached the United Nations for a similar statement.

Roger Cukierman, the president of CRIF, an umbrella organization for French Jews, spoke to the Conference of Presidents on Tuesday, expressing disappointment at the number of non-Jews who attended a French rally for Ilan Halimi, who was beaten to death last week in a Paris suburb.

Francois Delattre, France's consul general in New York, told the Jewish leaders his country would "go ballistic" against anti-Semitic attacks in the country. In a related development, a memorial for Halimi is to take place Thursday in New York City.

Jews, blacks show solidarity after shooting

Jewish and African American officials in New York came together in a show of solidarity after the shooting death of a Jewish man in Brooklyn.

Ephraim Klein, a 43-year-old Chabad-Lubavitch man, was gunned down early Tuesday while moving his van in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

The motive for the shooting remains unknown.

"It's good community dynamics for leadership of this multiethnic geographical area to stand together and call for an end to gun violence and to continue the cooperation that has existed in this neighborhood for the past decade," said Michael Miller, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which took part in Tuesday's news conference, organized by the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council.

The council is offering a \$10,000 reward for information on the murder.

The demonstration of unity was in part an effort to stave off any potential violence should anti-Semitism be found to have been the motive for the killing, Miller said, adding that a desire to get guns off Brooklyn's streets was sufficient reason to come together.

Religious leaders seek diplomacy

The Reform and Reconstructionist movements joined Christian and Muslim leaders in calling on President Bush to make Middle East peace a larger priority.

In a letter to Bush on Tuesday, the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace urged the United States not to act "precipitously to cut off aid to the Palestinian people."

The group is made up of 25 religious groups that are seeking a "careful response" to Hamas' victory last month in the Palestinian parliamentary elections and pushing for urgent diplomatic action in the region.

The group also called on Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel.

Group to monitor Air Force

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs voted to monitor guidelines for religious tolerance in the U.S. Air Force.

The umbrella organization for Jewish community relations councils and national organizations said Monday it would "closely track" the implementation of the Air Force's interim guidelines to ensure that they safeguard against proselytizing and improper sectarian prayer.

"The critical question is whether people who serve in the military understand the principle reason for being in the military, which is to support and defend the Constitution," said Rabbi Joel Schwartzman of Colorado, a retired Air Force Jewish chaplain.

The JCPA also voted Monday at its annual meeting to support rebuilding of the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina and to form a task force to address genocide in the Sudan.

MIDDLE EAST

Report: Dubai firm follows Israel boycott

The Dubai firm seeking to take over some operations at U.S. ports reportedly enforces a boycott against Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported Tuesday that Dubai Ports World examines "certificates of origin" to make sure that products entering Dubai do not originate in Israel.

The Post reported that the U.S. Office of Anti-Boycott Compliance fined at least three companies last year for complying with boycott-related requests received from the Dubai government, which runs Dubai Ports World.

Olmert plays down Hamas threat

Hamas does not threaten Israel's existence, Ehud Olmert said.

"Hamas does not scare us. Hamas is not a threat to our existence," the Israeli interim prime minister said Monday in a speech to retired military top brass.

"Hamas is a sworn enemy, and if there is need to fight it, we will know how to do so with all the might, resourcefulness and courage at our disposal," he said.

Olmert added that he hopes Mahmoud Abbas will not step down as Palestinian Authority president.

Two hurt in West Bank stabbing

A Palestinian wounded two West Bank settlers in a stabbing spree.

A 25-year-old man and 17-year-old girl were hospitalized in stable condition following Tuesday's attack at the Gush Etzion junction. The assailant, a Palestinian from nearby Hebron, was shot and wounded by police. It was not immediately clear if the attack was ordered by a Palestinian terrorist group.

WORLD

From cell, Irving denies Holocaust

Convicted Holocaust denier David Irving reiterated that Hitler did not have a systematic plan to exterminate Europe's Jews.

Speaking from his jail cell in Austria, Irving told the BBC that "Adolf Hitler's own involvement" in the Holocaust "has a big question mark behind it."

Irving also said he now believes some Jews were gassed during World War II, but he does not believe that many people were gassed at Auschwitz, where he contends there were only two small gas chambers.

Alleged synagogue attacker pleads not guilty

A Russian man suspected of attacking worshippers in a Moscow synagogue pleaded not guilty to a charge of attempted murder.

Alexander Koptsev, 20, told a Russian judge on Tuesday that he was not guilty because the Criminal Code was "written by Jews and the Jewish Mafia."

Prosecutors classified the Jan. 11 attack in which eight people were injured as attempted murder and attempt to cause injuries because of ethnic or religious hatred, which in Russia carry a maximum punishment of life in prison.