

IN THE NEWS
Mofaz: Iran gave \$1.8 million to Jihad

Iran gave \$1.8 million to Islamic Jihad last month, Israel's defense minister said.

The money was supposed to fuel terror attacks within Israel, Shaul Mofaz told The Associated Press.

Israel has been on high alert for terrorist attacks in advance of its March 28 elections, and foiled one bombing on Tuesday, reportedly planned by Islamic Jihad.

Palestinians charged as Al-Qaida members

Two West Bank Palestinians were charged in an Israeli court with membership in Al-Qaida. The two residents of Nablus charged Tuesday are believed to be the first Palestinians charged with belonging to the terrorist group. Azzam Abu Al-Ades and Bilal Hafanawi were arrested in December 2005 at the Allenby Bridge crossing between Jordan and the West Bank.

They were allegedly on their way to carry out a terrorist attack.

Prayer week for Darfur unveiled

U.S. Jewish groups announced a "Week of Prayer and Action for Darfur."

The Save Darfur Coalition, an alliance of more than 150 religious groups representing 130 million Americans, is inviting communities of all faiths to participate April 2-9 for the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the African region. Organizers said the goal is to promote the "Million Voices for Darfur" campaign to generate 1 million postcards to President Bush to support a stronger, multinational force to protect the people of Darfur.

The U.S. government has declared the humanitarian crisis a genocide, with 300,000 deaths and millions more people forced into refugee camps after a government-sponsored campaign of violence.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Federation system to launch new process to fund global needs

By RACHEL POMERANCE

ATLANTA (JTA) — It is a death over which few will shed tears.

The United Jewish Communities, the coordinating body for the North American Jewish federation system, is scrapping the process it has been using for several years to determine its funding of overseas programs.

The much-lamented Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee, known as ONAD, is being supplanted with an agreement between UJC's two main overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel, which funds Israeli immigration and absorption as well as Zionist programs worldwide, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which provides relief and welfare programs for Jews abroad.

The agencies, with approval for direct negotiations by the UJC's board, agreed on March 13 to continue the longtime 75-25 split in core overseas funding that favors the Jewish Agency. Currently, the Jewish Agency receives about \$138 million from the federation system and the JDC receives \$46 million, \$3 million of which it dispenses to World ORT, a global vocational training program.

An additional 10 percent of overseas funds comes from designated gifts by individual federations to the agency of their choice.

As part of the agreement, the federation system will advance \$18 million to the JDC from its special campaign, Operation Promise, to aid needy elderly in the former Soviet Union. Operation Promise, which has raised \$50 million in pledges, aims to raise \$160 million over three years for Ethiopian immi-

gration and absorption in Israel, and to help revitalize and aid the Jewish community in the former Soviet Union.

The two-year agreement between JDC and the Jewish Agency will come before the UJC board for approval in June and would begin July 1.

The new agreement, essentially a return to pre-ONAD days, is hailed by many for returning order to what had become a messy process.

But the decision raises a serious question.

ONAD was created for a reason — to help boost overseas funds. Since local federations do not always comply with UJC recommendations, to what extent will the new process urge increased funding overseas?

ONAD was born along with the UJC — the 1999 merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal. The streamlined system was created, in part, to reverse a trend of declining federation dollars overseas in favor of local projects. ONAD, a committee representing a cross section of federation leadership, was meant to engage people in overseas projects, inspiring the system to boost overseas giving.

Under ONAD, dollars allocated for overseas fell at a less drastic rate, but the funding never substantially increased.

At the same time, the process pitted the Jewish Agency against the JDC, creating a climate of competition, with each group pleading for money to respond to basic human needs. The Jewish Agency, for example, lobbied for lifting up poor Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, and the JDC detailed the needs of

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FOCUS ON ISSUES

A death knell is sounded for the federation system's committee for overseas funding

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hungry Holocaust survivors in the former Soviet Union.

Many complained the exercise was a political logjam: When ONAD members discussed altering the 75-25 split, Israeli heavyweights, including Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, petitioned ONAD members to make Jewish Agency funding a priority.

When the last round of negotiations ended in December 2004, the committee's two-year plan recommended that the split remain unchanged.

But all the politicking and recommendations belied a much more serious issue in the federation system, insiders say — the noncompliance of individual federations to meet these recommendations.

That in turn intensified the fighting between the UJC's overseas partners, who fear a dwindling pool of funds.

JDC's executive vice president, Steven Schwager, warned that the new agreement is contingent on maintaining current levels of overseas funding.

But federation dollars largely stay local. According to an October 2005 UJC report of the ONAD review process, while the federations' combined annual campaign, which tops \$800 million, increased by 4 percent together since 2000, dollars for overseas have dropped by more than 4.5 percent since 2001.

According to Richard Wexler of Chicago, a UJC board member and head of the Jewish Agency's North American Council, the first year of ONAD saw excellent com-

pliance, but then federations slipped back into a pre-ONAD practice, making decisions independent of the ONAD request.

Furthermore, the ONAD process eroded trust in UJC's overseas partners by forcing the two agencies into competition, he said.

In his weekly letter to federations last Friday, Howard Rieger, UJC's president and CEO, stressed the need to boost funding overseas, but did not detail modes of advocacy.

"Core needs must be sustained and the only way to do so is for them to keep pace with the growth of Annual Campaigns," he wrote. "Many communities act upon that principle, but some have either chosen not to, or found it difficult to meet this commitment.

We must work with every federation to do everything in our power to shore up that aspect of our operations."

Rieger declined an interview with JTA until the new agreement is approved.

For their part, the JDC and the Jewish Agency appear pleased.

"Like any negotiations, they weren't

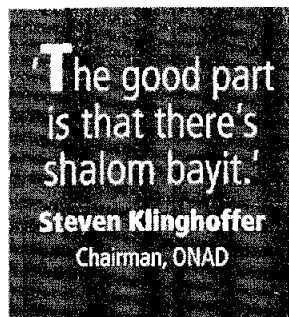
easy but there was a spirit I think in the room that both JAFI and JDC have a renewed dedication to working together" with UJC to raise the profile of overseas needs in the federation system, said Jay Sarver of St. Louis, budget and finance chairman of the Jewish Agency.

In fact, some say ONAD may have helped pave the way. It spawned the growth of Israel and overseas committees at federations that were engaged in a healthy debate about allocations, said Steven Klinghoffer of MetroWest, N.J., the most recent ONAD chairman.

But even Klinghoffer suggested that the exercise failed, citing issues of federation compliance and the formation of Operation Promise.

"One could argue that the Operation Promise campaign would not have been necessary if we had been able to re-prioritize" funding, addressing those needs through the general campaign, he said.

At least now, he said, "the good part is that there's shalom bayit," or peace in the house.



Cuban Jewish leader was close to Castro

By LARRY LUXNER

MIAMI (JTA) — It was December 1999, and Fidel Castro was meeting with 70 religious leaders on the touchy subject of declaring Dec. 25 a national holiday.

Castro turned to Dr. Jose Miller, president of Cuba's tiny Jewish community, and asked for his opinion of Christmas, given that no Jewish holidays were being given equal consideration.

Miller stood up and declared that "as a Jew, I would feel very happy with the designation of Dec. 25 as a national holiday, because after all, what is Christmas if not the celebration of one of the greatest Jews in history, Jesus of Nazareth?"

That story is told by Rev. Jose Lopez, secretary of the Cuban Council of Churches. Lopez considered himself a close friend of Miller, who died Feb. 27 at age 80.

"We will never forget his words on many occasions that showed his love for Cuba, his Jewish principles and affection for his

Christian brethren," Lopez said.

Eddie Levy, chairman of the South Florida organization Jewish Solidarity, told the Miami Herald, "If there is a Jewish community in Cuba, it's because of his leadership. It was his job, his work, his life."

Since 1981, Miller also had been the president of the Patronato, a large synagogue in Havana's once-fashionable Vedado district.

He managed to revive smaller synagogues in Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba. But he was criticized by Cuban exiles in Miami as a tool of the Castro regime for refusing to support the dissident movement or speak out against repression in Cuba.

"The government does not manipulate me," Miller insisted in a 2003 interview with JTA. "What interests me is how Castro acts toward the Jewish community. I don't ask anyone in the Jewish community what he thinks about politics. We're not pro-Castro or anti-Castro here. If someone wants to be a dissident, let him be one — but not inside the Patronato."

JTA WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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American donors to Israeli parties draw back

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jewish involvement in Israeli elections is at an ebb, with the shadow of two Sharons — father Ariel and son Omri — hanging heavy over once-eager fund-raisers.

The elder Sharon's decision to split from the Likud Party last year and form the centrist Kadima has led some of Likud's traditional stateside donors to reconsider whether to fund any party.

The prime minister's crippling stroke in January removed him from the race, ending the personal relationship that made him one of the country's most impressive fund-raisers.

Omri Sharon's guilty plea last year, to charges related to violating Israeli laws on overseas fund-raising, also has inhibited donations, according to those who monitor American political giving to Israeli parties.

Israeli law limits overseas funding for politicians to primary races. For years, those laws have been honored in the breach, but the Israeli government's renewed seriousness in prosecuting the laws — and the spectacle of the scion of a pioneering family serving time — have given donors here pause.

"Because of the high profile of the Omri Sharon event, people want to stay clear," said Ken Bob, president of Ameinu, formerly the Labor Zionist Alliance. "People don't want to damage the image of Israel and the candidates they support."

The reluctance to get involved financially does not mean American Jews are less invested in the process. At the recent American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference in Washington, the heads of the three major Israeli parties running in the March 28 elections gave videolinked speeches to some 5,000 delegates.

Ehud Olmert, Sharon's successor to helm Kadima, and Labor Party head Amir Peretz got polite applause for their commitment to seek moderate Palestinians for negotiations, despite the landslide victory in Palestinian elections of the terrorist group Hamas. Olmert's pledge to see a Palestinian state in place by 2010 was met with stony silence.

By contrast, Likud Party leader Ben-

jamin Netanyahu was loudly applauded for pledging never to give up the Jordan Valley and to bring more West Bank settlements inside Israel's security barrier, essentially annexing more land.

"Wherever your political career takes you, we will be your friend, and we know that you will always be a friend of the U.S.-Israel relationship," Michael Levin, an

AIPAC board member, said after Netanyahu's address.

Dor Chadash, a group that "builds bridges between young Israeli and American Jews," is running an online poll on the elections, and earlier this month hosted a forum with party spokesmen at New York's 92nd Street Y.

"The interest is greater than ever," said Marvin Lender, a Connecticut entrepreneur who is close to Olmert and Shimon Peres, the No. 2 Kadima candidate. "But I don't see the level of fund-raising that I've seen in the past."

The result, say those who have been involved in earlier campaigns, is that one sure sign of Israel's election season — flocks of Israeli politicians fluttering through New York's finest hotels and eateries — is going the way of the dodo.

"I don't see the same intensity and the same fire," said Ronn Torossian, a New York publicist who has represented Likud politicians in the past. "I haven't found politicians coming here as quickly as last time."

Lender said Israeli politicians are more focused than ever on winning every vote they can in what is bound to be a hard-fought election.

"They're spending an enormous amount of time campaigning," said Lender, chairman of the Israel Policy Forum, a group that advocates greater U.S. engagement in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. "I think it's a good thing."

Because overseas funding of Israeli politicians is limited to primary races, fund-raising on this side of the Atlantic wrapped up in the fall, at least formally.

"There is very limited if any contact

with the U.S. at the moment," said Maya Jacobs, a spokeswoman for Kadima.

"We are not soliciting money at all, there is still no 'Kadima Friends of' abroad, and we are focusing only on the audience within Israel that is eligible to vote," she said.

Others say fund-raising for the three major parties is still going on.

Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, said representatives of Likud and Kadima have approached people in his circle, who traditionally are Likud supporters. Unlike previous elections, however, the leaders themselves have not made personal appearances in American homes.

"Not Olmert and Bibi," Klein said, using Netanyahu's nickname, "but their surrogates are here raising funds. They've contacted people for parlor meetings."

Klein said the people he knows have tended to rebuff Kadima overtures, angry at the abandonment of "Land of Israel" ideology by former Likud stalwarts such as Olmert.

"'We don't support people, we support policies,' is what they're saying," Klein said.

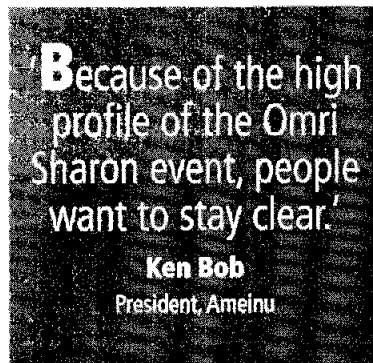
Torossian suggested Sharon's absence was also a factor. Last year, Torossian said, the mythic Israeli warrior and statesman was able to convince American Jewish hawks to back his support for land concessions. Ultimately, many Likud supporters backed Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and evacuate settlers there.

"Toward the end people were saying, 'If Arik is saying it's okay, it's okay,'" Torossian said, using Sharon's nickname. "It's all about personal relationships. As much as people write checks to parties, they write checks to people."

While the fund-raising has diminished, it hasn't disappeared entirely, he said.

"There are hotels and restaurants in New York where you will see Cabinet and Knesset members every day of the week and get more access than in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem," Torossian said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES



NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Tel Aviv bombing foiled

Israeli security forces foiled a Palestinian suicide bombing planned for Tel Aviv.

Acting on an intelligence tip, paramilitary police and Shin Bet agents on Tuesday pulled over a van headed from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Inside the vehicle were 10 Palestinians and a bag containing an 11-pound bomb. All the passengers were taken into custody, though some were believed to be day laborers from the West Bank unconnected to the attempted attack.

Hezbollah firm on prisoners

Hezbollah pledged to secure the release of Lebanese jailed in Israel. "The day or night will come when we will fulfill our promise to the detainees and return them to freedom," Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said in a Beirut speech Monday.

In 2004, Israel freed hundreds of Arab security prisoners, including several Lebanese, in exchange for the repatriation of an Israeli hostage held by Hezbollah and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers killed in a border ambush.

But a leading Lebanese terrorist remains jailed in Israel, where security sources say his release could be contingent on Hezbollah supplying information on the whereabouts of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad.

Abdullah urges peace deal

Jordan's King Abdullah said time is running out for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. Abdullah said Monday that, given Hamas' victory in Palestinian Authority elections and Israel's construction of the West Bank security fence, "we are physically running out of time."

During a visit to Paris, Abdullah said, "I don't think we have more than two years if we're all talking about a viable, independent Palestinian state." Abdullah also denied his country and Israel were at odds.

"The tensions were actually exaggerated by people who wanted to do so, via the press," he said.

High hopes for Hamas

Most Palestinians want their Hamas-led government to pursue peace with Israel, a survey found. According to the poll released this week by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 75 percent of Palestinians say Hamas should engage Israel in peace talks, though just 59 percent believe the radical Islamic group should recognize the Jewish state's right to exist.

Despite the threat of international isolation looming since Hamas won elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in January, 70 percent of Palestinians said they expect the new government to succeed.

But almost the same number — 68 percent — said they thought the Palestinian Authority would not survive if international aid is cut off.

Outpost probe issues criticism

Israeli security forces were criticized for their handling of violent confrontations with settlers at a West Bank outpost. A Knesset panel set up to probe last month's evacuation of the Amona outpost issued interim findings Tuesday, accusing police and soldiers of being ill-prepared for scuffles that resulted in scores of injured.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra were censured for not allowing junior security officers to testify.

The panel also had hard words for the ringleaders of the settler resistance at Amona.

El Al offers election tickets

El Al is offering reduced airfare to Israel for the upcoming election. The \$695 round-trip special from New York to Tel Aviv is aimed at Israeli citizens living overseas who wish to vote in the March 28 election. Hundreds have taken advantage of the deal so far, El Al representatives said. Passengers must depart March 26 or March 27 and return April 9 or April 10.

Kabbalist 'explains' bird flu

A leading Israeli rabbi blamed local outbreaks of avian flu on sexual permissiveness.

"The Bible says that God punishes depravity first through blights on animals, and then on humans," David Basri, a top kabbalist, was quoted as writing this week in an edict. Basri linked the first discovery of avian flu in Israeli poultry farms over the weekend to election campaign ads by left-wing Israeli parties calling for the legalization of gay marriage.

Basri faces a criminal investigation for denigrating Arabs in a recent speech.

WORLD

Poll: More French say they're racist

Racism in France is rising, according to a new poll. Some 30 percent of French people consider themselves racist, up from 35 percent a year ago. The national Consultative Commission of Human Rights, which commissioned the survey, said the rise indicated the lifting of a taboo against racism, The Associated Press reported. However, racist and anti-Semitic violence and threats fell to 974 in 2005 from 1,574 in 2004, the commission said.

Nazi war crimes trial begins

The trial of a suspected Nazi collaborator began in Lithuania. The Simon Wiesenthal Center called upon Lithuanian authorities to expedite the trial of Algimantas Dailide, which began Sunday in Vilnius.

The center's Israel director, Efraim Zuroff, expressed hope that "the delay of justice and absence of punishment that characterized the cases of Dailide's superiors" in the Lithuanian security police, Alexandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimzauskas, would not recur in this case.

Dailide moved to the United States in 1950 and lived there until he was ordered deported in 2002. No one has been convicted of Nazi-era war crimes in Lithuania since the country became independent in 1991.

NORTH AMERICA

Group angry with FDA pick

The National Council of Jewish Women said it is "deeply troubled" with President Bush's choice for Food and Drug Administration commissioner. The organization said Tuesday that the president's promotion last week of Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach, who had been serving as acting head of the FDA since September 2005, to the permanent position was problematic because of his opposition to the Plan B emergency contraceptive. Phyllis Snyder, NCJW's president, said the drug has received favorable recommendations by both a scientific advisory panel and the FDA's own scientists, but under von Eschenbach's leadership, the FDA has failed to meet statutory deadlines to make it available over the counter.