

IN THE NEWS

B'nai B'rith tourists die in Chilean crash

Twelve Americans on a B'nai B'rith trip were killed in a bus accident in northern Chile. The victims were returning to their Celebrity Cruises ship after visiting Lauca National Park on Wednesday when their bus swerved off the highway and plunged 300 feet down a mountainside, U.S. and Chilean officials said. [Story, Pg. 3]

P.A.: We won't arrest any terrorists

Hamas' designated chief of the Palestinian Authority security forces said he would not arrest wanted terrorists.

"The day will never come when any Palestinian would be arrested because of his political affiliation or because of resisting the occupation," Sayed Seyam, who was named as interior minister in the upcoming Hamas-led government, told Reuters Thursday.

"The file of political detention must be closed," Seyam said P.A. security forces would actively oversee attacks on Israel.

Bush lifts Ukraine restrictions

President Bush signed legislation graduating Ukraine from Soviet-era trade restrictions.

"Times have changed," Bush said Thursday before signing the bill graduating the former Soviet republic from the Jackson-Vanik restrictions.

"The Cold War is over, and a free Ukraine is a friend to America and an inspiration to those who love liberty." The sanctions were imposed in 1974 because of the Soviet Union's emigration and human rights policies toward Jews. Members of a coalition supporting normalized trade status with Ukraine, including NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia, attended the signing ceremony.

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WORLD REPORT

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With Kadima still strong in polls, Olmert already planning coalition

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli elections are often too close to call — but not this time.

Voting doesn't begin until the morning of March 28, yet virtually all the pundits



Avi Ohayon/GPO/BP Images/JTA

Israeli interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert speaks to the media at his home March 7, 2006, in Jerusalem.

are predicting that Interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima Party will win by a landslide, and the political focus already is on the post-election coalition he'll build.

Most analysts expect that Olmert's main coalition partner will be Labor. The Likud Party seemed to rule itself out by campaigning vigorously against the cornerstone of Olmert's foreign policy — a second unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank.

As for the smaller parties, the main contenders for coalition spots are Avigdor Lieberman's right-wing Russian immigrant party, Yisrael Beiteinu; the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism and Shas parties;

and possibly also the dovish Meretz.

If the numbers in the latest polls hold up, Olmert will be able to build a stable four- to five-party coalition, commanding 70-80 seats in the 120-member Knesset and ostensibly strong enough to carry out his far-reaching political plans.

Indeed, several pundits maintain that Olmert will have a much sounder base for sweeping political moves than Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ever did.

Kadima has displayed impressive strength throughout the campaign. For 10 successive weeks, opinion polls have showed it running close to 40 Knesset seats, and nothing has seemed to dent its progress, not Sharon's illness — he has been comatose since a Jan. 4 stroke — or personal attacks on Olmert.

Olmert quickly countered a slight recent wobble by clarifying his West Bank withdrawal lines and the logic behind the withdrawal plan.

But it was the Israel Defense Forces operation last week, capturing wanted men the Palestinians had intended to set free from a Jericho jail, that finally cemented Olmert's leadership. The army's resolution and control in breaking into the jail, in which the assassins of Tourism Minister Rehavam

Ze'evi were being held, reflected on Olmert. After being attacked by the Likud as being soft on security, Olmert came across as courageous and coolheaded enough to be entrusted with the nation's defense policy.

After the Jericho operation, Likud leaders acknowledged that their campaign against Olmert had fallen flat, and Labor leaders conceded that their dreams of a last-gasp

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■ *Those who want a more socially sensitive coalition will vote Labor, say analysts*

Continued from page 1
turnaround in the polls were over.

Yediot Achronot political analyst Nahum Barnea summed up the prevailing mood when he argued that all that remained for middle-of-the-road voters was to determine the balance between Kadima and Labor at the heart of the next coalition.

“People who want Olmert’s government to be more socially sensitive and more dovish can vote Labor; those who are worried about going too far on both counts can vote Kadima,” he wrote.

Labor Party leader Amir Peretz has started spelling out his conditions for joining an Olmert-led coalition. Foreign policy will not be a problem, he says, but the socioeconomic agenda could be a deal-breaker.

“The coalition will stand or fall on socioeconomic issues,” Peretz declared in weekend interviews with Israeli newspapers. His fundamental demands are raising the monthly minimum wage from \$750 to \$1,000, providing pensions for all, enforcing legislation to prevent manpower companies from exploiting non-unionized workers, and enlarging the basket of subsidized medicines.

If this works out, there is still another potential hitch — the question of ministries. Kadima will want to retain the defense, foreign affairs and finance portfolios; Labor will want at least one of the top posts.

A compromise here will be essential. One possibility would be for Olmert to

create a special ministry for Peretz — say Trade and Industry, with additional responsibility for job creation — as well as chairmanship of the Ministerial Committee on Socioeconomic Affairs.

The next step in Olmert’s coalition building is likely to be the co-option of a right-wing party to act as a counterweight to Labor and a buffer against anticipated right-wing criticism of a Kadima-led government. The ideal candidate is Avigdor Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu.

Though extremely hawkish, Lieberman has bought into the idea of separation from the Palestinians as the only way to preserve Israel’s Jewish character. Indeed, he is prepared to take the idea even further, proposing that the borderlines be redrawn to place some Israeli Arab villages on the Palestinian side.

Lieberman will insist on the Interior Ministry for himself and an ironfisted approach to law and order.

Partly to attract right-wing votes and partly to make it easier for right-wing parties to join his coalition, Olmert declared last week that his government would retain the large West Bank settlement of Ariel — though that means carving out an enclave in Palestinian territory — and that he would build up the area between Jerusalem and Ma’aleh Adumim, a large neighboring settlement, though that’s certain to encounter strong international opposition.

To increase the size of his coalition, Olmert also will negotiate with United Torah Judaism and Shas. The main payoff in

both cases will be restoration of funding to fervently Orthodox education and large families.

To make sure he has a majority even if the right-wingers and Orthodox bolt over a West Bank withdrawal, Olmert could

bring in the dovish Meretz. Meretz leader Yossi Beilin and Lieberman recently have formed a friendship, despite the political chasm between them. Pundits see this as partly designed to signal

that they could serve together in the same government.

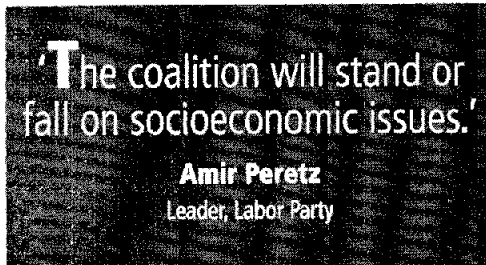
More likely though, Olmert will go for Lieberman and the fervently Orthodox first — and only if they bolt will he approach Meretz.

What could torpedo this idyllic scenario for Olmert and Kadima? Only if the right wing garners 60 or more of the 120 Knesset seats, setting up a blocking group to prevent Olmert from forming a government.

So far, according to polls, the right-wingers have only 50 seats. Gaining 10 more seats means winning over another 350,000 people, a tall order for one week.

If Labor were to join a right-wing blocking group, however, it could form a government, with Peretz getting the premiership in exchange for his support — although he emphatically denies this could happen.

Indeed, Olmert seems certain of victory. He already has appointed Yoram Turbowicz, a high-ranking Treasury official slated to be his White House-style chief of staff, as his main coalition negotiator. Now all that remains is for Kadima to bring out the vote on Election Day. ■



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Olmert sets terms for government

Ehud Olmert said only parties favoring further West Bank withdrawals would be able to join the Israeli government if he wins next week’s election. “Whoever is not prepared to be a partner in the plan cannot be a partner in the coalition,” the interim Israeli prime minister said in a television interview Wednesday. The declaration appeared to rule out

Yisrael Beiteinu, headed by the right-wing Avigdor Lieberman, who is against unilateral territorial concessions to the Palestinians. New opinion polls Thursday predicted Olmert’s Kadima Party will win the March 28 vote, but by a narrowing margin. Kadima is seen taking 34-37 of the Knesset’s 120 seats, while the runner-up, Labor, takes around 21 seats. ■

B'nai B'rith trip ends in tragedy, with 12 dead

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Twelve American tourists on a B'nai B'rith trip to South America were killed Wednesday when their bus fell 300 feet down a mountainside.

Two additional American passengers, as well as the Chilean tour guide and driver, were hospitalized with broken bones.

The group was part of a 64-person B'nai B'rith group on a 14-day Celebrity Cruise Lines jaunt around South America, and was returning to the ship after visiting Lauca National Park in Arica when their bus swerved to avert an oncoming truck and plunged off the highway.

Officials with B'nai B'rith International said the passengers lived in The Ponds, an age-restricted development in Monroe Township, N.J., and originally were from places throughout the Northeast. They ranged in age from 63 to 76, according to an unconfirmed list that appeared in the Chilean press.

The Associated Press confirmed the identities of two victims, Ira and Linda Greenfield of Stamford, Conn.

The cruise line did not release victims' names, but said family members of the deceased had been notified and about a dozen were heading to Chile to identify the bodies.

Rabbi Leibel Miller of the Sacred Jewish Burial Society of Florida accompanied cruise line officials to Chile on Wednesday evening and was assisting the victims and their families, said Lynn Martenstein, vice president for corporate communications of Celebrity Cruise Lines.

The Millennium ship captain and cruise director met Wednesday with 50 other members of the B'nai B'rith group who had not gone on the fatal bus trip, then informed the rest of the ship's passengers of the accident, Martenstein said. They met again with the group Thursday morning.

B'nai B'rith group members were given the option of returning to the United States, but all decided to continue to the next port in Lima, Peru. Martenstein said several may leave the ship in Lima.

The cruise is scheduled to return to Fort Lauderdale, Fla. on April 2.

The cruise line has a chartered plane standing by in Arica to return the victims to the United States and to accommodate family members.

B'nai B'rith officials said the director of

the group's Santiago office was en route as well.

"We are shocked, stunned and saddened by this news," said Joel Kaplan, president of B'nai B'rith International.

The Lauca excursion was booked separately by the B'nai B'rith members, and the tour was not affiliated with the cruise line, Martenstein said. The tour was not licensed, according to Chilean officials.

The two passengers who suffered broken bones were moved to an intensive care unit, Dan Hanrahan, president of Celebrity Cruises, said at a press conference Thursday. They are being treated at Arica's Juan Noe Hospital, and are in stable condition.

"At this moment, all of us share the pain and anguish of this terrible event," Hanrahan said. "We are devastated."

An administrator at The Ponds said she believed all the victims were members of the non-sectarian retirement community,

and said the South American trip had been organized independently from The Ponds but was geared towards its residents.

"They were very well known, very well liked and very active," Eileen Marcus, community manager of The Ponds, said of the victims. "People are just in shock. It's a very close-knit community and this is affecting all of them."

Grief counselors from Jewish Family Services were at The Ponds on Thursday.

Rabbi Daniel Cohen of Congregation Agudath Sholom in Stamford told The Associated Press that relatives of the Greenfields were en route to Chile.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family during this difficult time," he said. "Ev-

eryone is in a tremendous state of shock and sadness."

JTA Washington bureau chief Ron Kampeas and intern David Silverman contributed to this report.

'We are shocked, stunned and saddened.'

Joel Kaplan

President, B'nai B'rith International

PETA has fresh beef with kosher plant

By PETER EPHROSS

NEW YORK (JTA) — A kosher slaughtering plant says it has come to terms with a written warning from a U.S. government agency.

But the activist group behind the complaints that led the U.S. Department of Agriculture to probe the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, isn't satisfied.

A spokesman for Agriprocessors, which received the warning following an investigation into allegations that kosher slaughter rules — and therefore, U.S. law — were being violated at the plant, said the company accepted the probe.

"It was fair," Mike Thomas said. "That's the job of the regulator and we respect it."

But People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the animal-rights group that ignited the controversy in 2004 when it sent an undercover person into the plant with a video camera, promises not to let the issue rest. The group vowed to appeal to the U.S. Attorney's Office that declined to prosecute the case, call on the Agriculture Department to fire investigators who failed

to enforce kosher standards and intensify calls on the Orthodox Union, which oversees kosher operations at the plant, to allow what PETA calls "legitimate animal welfare experts" into the plant to monitor the process. The release of the report reignited an issue that created controversy in the kosher world.

In the report, which can be found at www.peta.org, investigators with the Agriculture Department determined that employees at the plant violated humane slaughter regulations.

Soon after PETA released the video in 2004, the Orthodox Union said it would no longer allow slaughterers to pull out an animal's trachea to hasten death. Instead, an artery that supplies blood to the brain will be severed on a second cut. Also, the plant now has a stun gun that can be used to make animals insensate if the initial cut does not do so, though this meat is not sold as kosher.

As a result of the investigation, the Agriculture Department suspended one of its inspectors for 14 days and gave warning letters to two others.

Israeli candidates battle voter apathy

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Shimon Peres joins a young couple having lunch at a seaside restaurant and asks them who they are voting for in Israel's upcoming election. They smile nervously, glance up at the swarm of photographers and TV cameras that surround the former prime minister and admit the truth: They don't know.

"No one has convinced us what the right path is and we ourselves don't even know, making it harder," said Nurit Novak, 26, as Peres, clad in a leather bomber jacket and campaigning for the Kadima Party, moves on to the next table. There are many voters left to woo.

Yarin Yeger, a 20-year-old soldier, strolling along a nearby boardwalk, says she too feels adrift politically.

"I don't see any of the candidates as potentially good prime ministers," she said.

■
Campaigners in the March 28 election are battling voter apathy and indecision, concepts once alien to this country that for decades had voter turnout of about 80 percent and in which most people had a political camp to which they were committed.

Polls describe about 20 percent of the population as "floating voters" — still undecided this close to the election date.

Many voters feel that none of the candidates have the stature or pull of Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, who has been in a coma since a Jan. 4 stroke.

"There is great confusion because Sharon is no longer at the helm," said Nitza Hameiri, 56, a real-estate appraiser.

There is little sense of election excitement despite dramatic changes — a prime minister who lies comatose, leaving behind his new party; a Sephardi Jew leading the Labor Party for the first time; and Hamas' recent victory in Palestinian elections.

Voter turnout is expected to be lower than in past elections. In 2003, it was already low, with slightly less than 69 percent of registered voters casting ballots.

The assumption that Kadima will trounce its rivals contributes to a sense of ennui, observers say. In the most recent polls, Kadima is predicted to win between 37 and 39 seats in Israel's 120-seat Knesset. Those seeking change are finding it in Kadima, breaking down the Israeli electorate from its former pattern of left vs. right.

Beyond this is apathy borne from a ris-

ing mistrust of the government to effect change, disgust with recent revelations of corruption and an increasingly individualistic society that feels less of a need to be involved civically.

Voter apathy is even more apparent in Israel's younger generation. A poll by One Voice, a grass-roots movement that encourages dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, found that 27 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 32 are interested in the upcoming elections and that 44 percent plan to vote.

Political analyst Yossi Klein Halevi said he welcomes the establishment of Kadima, and the low-key, yet "historic" election he said it seems to have prompted.

"People who complain that this is a boring election are frustrated leftists and rightists. This is our first election in which the center is not only a vague longing on the part of many Israelis but an actual option," said Halevi, a senior fellow at Shalem Center, a think tank in Jerusalem.

"This election has changed the political map for the first time in decades. We are no longer a society defined by a right and left schism but a political system with a strong center."

Halevi sees the changes in Israeli politics as a sign of political maturation.

"One reason we have so many political parties is that we have still been in the mentality of the Jewish exile in which you needed to find the party that represented your highest ideals precisely," he said.

"We are seeing parties as frameworks for resolving issues through compromise," Halevi said. "This is a realization of normal politics."

■
Candidates and campaigners, however, continue to employ the language of left and right. Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud has taken to calling Olmert, "Smolmert," a pun on the Hebrew word for left. In one of the Likud's ad campaigns, which have been seen as the most negative among the parties, an announcer's voice intones, "Olmert and the left will bring Hamas closer."

Ad campaigns are used by parties of

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Brian Hender/JTA

Kadima Party member Shimon Peres, left, campaigns during a pre-election tour for his party in Tel Aviv, March 17.

all sizes: Every night, campaign ads are broadcast for a consecutive hour on three national television networks.

Some of the smaller groups broadcasting include a party against high banking fees, a party representing Holocaust survivors and their children,

and the Green Leaf Party, which promotes legalizing marijuana and gay marriage.

In one Labor ad, party leader Amir Peretz, who is battling an image as an anti-intellectual demagogue, is seen in a mock prime ministerial office signing papers on a large desk, Israeli flags stand-

ing behind him.

■
Meanwhile, at the port of Tel Aviv, Yitzhak Schwartzblat watches Peres kiss a baby. This is not the first time Schwartzblat, 71, has seen Peres on the campaign trail. He remembers hearing him speak during 1955 elections at a movie hall in Jaffa.

In those days, campaigning was very different, he said.

"People then knew exactly what the message of each party was. Today it does not matter — look at Peres," he said referring to his switch from Labor to Kadima. "Yesterday he was in one party, today another."

Schwartzblat would not reveal who he was voting for.

"I don't have a lot of secrets but this one secret I keep," he said. ■

People who complain that this is a boring election are frustrated leftists and rightists.

Yossi Klein Halevi
Senior fellow, Shalem Center

Ethiopian-Israelis delve into politics

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — When Shlomo Molla hits the campaign trail he is equipped with T-shirts, bumper stickers, and election fliers — all in Amharic.

Molla, an Ethiopian Israeli, is a candidate in the Kadima Party, which is expected to win the largest number of seats in Israel's March 28 elections.

Participating in politics, Molla says, is key to helping Ethiopians become part of their new society.

"I have seen that Ethiopians are not integrating into society," said Molla, 39, who immigrated to Israel at the age of 16. "We have to integrate into national politics. It's an important step in forwarding our society."

He takes pride in having been asked by Ariel Sharon to join the party shortly before the prime minister fell ill.

Molla has taken a leave of absence from his job consulting on Ethiopian affairs for the Jewish Agency while he campaigns.

He said he believes that the Kadima Party's plan to focus on education will help lift the Ethiopian community out of poverty.

Molla is one of three Ethiopian Israelis who are running in the upcoming Israeli elections, all of whom feel that is time for Ethiopians to find their political voice in greater numbers.

One of them, Avraham Negusa, has even launched the first-ever Israeli political party to be headed by an Ethiopian, called Atid Echad, or One Future.

"I see this as an historical achievement for our community," said Negusa, 48, a longtime political activist in the Ethiopian Israeli community.

"It encourages the young people. We should not sit and see what others do for us, it's time for us to stand up and take our future in our hands. We have to fight for equal opportunities for our community in Israel in education and employment," he said.

On his list of 10 candidates, which he heads, there are also five non-Ethiopian Israelis.

"Our appeal is to all of society," said Negusa, whose party is based on a

platform that calls for increased social services.

He was formerly in the Central Committee of the Likud Party but said he was disappointed by what he described as the party's lack of action on behalf of the Ethiopian community.

Mazor Bahina, 33, is another Ethiopian Israeli running for office.

He is running as a candidate in Shas.

The party, which claims most of its support from the Sephardi Jews, at first appears an unlikely political home for an Ethiopian Jew.

But Bahina, who was one of the first Ethiopian Israelis educated in its yeshiva system, said Shas makes perfect sense for the Ethiopian voter who is looking for a party that champions the poor

and working class and also cares about religion.

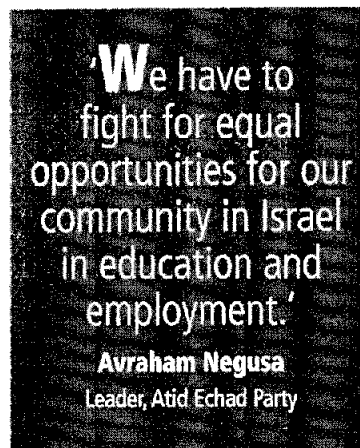
"The Ethiopian community is also very dedicated to religion," he said. "The Sephardim are the closest community to us and they too help out the poorer sectors of society."

Furthermore said Bahina, he hopes Shas' success helping raise the status and self-image of Sephardim will serve as a model for the Ethiopian Jewish community.

Bahina, who came from a small farming village in Ethiopia at the age of 11, said even though politics can be a messy arena, "Politics is power and even though people dismiss it, everything depends on what is legislated."

Bahina, who has run Shas youth centers in Beersheva for Ethiopians, said the community wants "someone of their own in the Knesset."

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Brian Hendler/JTA

Young Ethiopian Israelis recently shop in downtown Jerusalem.

UNRWA staffers: Neutral aides or active partisans?

By MICHAEL J. JORDAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — There may be no greater test of the United Nations' vaunted neutrality than to be a Palestinian staffer of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the Gaza Strip or West Bank.

UNRWA has 12,000-plus employees in those areas — where it's the second-largest employer after the Palestinian Authority — and similar numbers in camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In all, more than 99 percent of its staff members are Palestinian.

No other U.N. agency boasts such an overwhelming ratio of local to foreign field staff. And 90 percent of UNRWA employees are themselves refugees, the agency says.

UNRWA employees and their families in the Palestinian territories go through everything that society at large endures, which during the intifada meant the self-described "daily humiliations" of restricted movement, material deprivation and Israeli anti-terrorist raids.

Nevertheless, UNRWA employees must sign a code of conduct that compels them to avoid actions that "may adversely affect on their status, or on the integrity, independence and impartiality which are required by that status."

Realistically, though, some observers ask: Would it be surprising if UNRWA employees were to loathe Israel and embrace the Palestinian cause — and have it influence their work?

Some of UNRWA's harsher critics speak as if the agency were actively complicit in terrorism, but others say the situation isn't black and white. With lawlessness, intimidation and violence now widespread — UNRWA itself has relocated some international staff from Gaza to Jerusalem — Palestinian staff members may simply find it prudent to avert their eyes from the militancy around them.

UNRWA officials note that the U.N. General Assembly never gave the agency policing or intelligence-gathering responsibilities in its camps. Moreover, UNRWA officials say, it could be dangerous to ask too many questions about what's going on around them.

Yet staff certainly can make a difference, says Astrid Van Genderen Stort, a spokeswoman for the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, which takes care of the world's 19

million non-Palestinian refugees.

In some cases, Van Genderen Stort says, UNHCR teams with local military, police or foreign peacekeepers to look out for armed elements stirring up trouble. In other cases, camp residents have established something of a "nightwatch."

UNMASKING UNRWA

"It's not that we have intelligence on the ground or that they're spying on their neighbors, but they know who's in their community and they keep an eye out," says Van Genderen

Stort, who recently worked in Liberia's refugee camps. "We of course want to help only those who are refugees and in need of help. We don't want to be an agency that helps rebels who go out at night and fight."

When it comes to UNRWA, at least some staffers seem to share their clients' more extreme views.

The UNRWA teachers union, for example, reportedly is dominated by members affiliated with Hamas, listed as a terrorist organization in much of the West. Observers have cited numerous instances where suicide bombers and other terrorists were glorified in UNRWA schools, whether through graffiti on school walls or posters in the classrooms.

In one incident, Hamas convened a July 2001 conference in an UNRWA junior high school in Gaza's Jabalya refugee camp.

"The road to Palestine passes through the blood of the fallen, and these fallen have written history with parts of their flesh and their bodies," one UNRWA teacher, Saheil Alhinadi, said in praise of "martyrdom," a euphemism for suicide terrorism.

The former UNRWA chief, Peter Hansen, got into hot water in October 2004 when he told Canadian television, "I'm sure there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll, and I don't see that as a crime. Hamas as a political organization does not mean that every member is a militant, and we do not do political vetting and exclude people from one persuasion as against another."

Hansen later explained to JTA that he meant Hamas sympathizers, not members.

"Don't judge people by what you think

they may or may not believe; judge them by what they do, in their actions and in their behavior," he told JTA. "And there we get back to the very strict behavior code we have in the agency for what staff members are to do and not to do in their behavior."

Israel, however, says the question isn't just staff members' political allegiances but, sometimes, their actions.

In recent years, Israel has arrested dozens of UNRWA staffers — 31 from mid-2004 to mid-2005 alone, said UNRWA — for alleged involvement in terrorism and other activities. Most are released within days or weeks, without charges — but not all.

Nahed Attalah, an UNRWA official arrested by Israeli forces in 2002, reportedly confessed to using his U.N. travel permit and his UNRWA car to transport terrorists to attack sites, and to entering Syria and Lebanon to arrange weapons purchases for terrorist groups.

In August 2002, Israel arrested UNRWA ambulance driver Nidal Abd Al Fatah Abdallah Nazal, whom officials later said confessed to being a Hamas member and using his ambulance to transport arms

and messages to Hamas activists.

In 2003, Israel convicted three staffers: A Hamas member got 32 months for having a machine gun and delivering chemicals to a bombmaker; an Islamic Jihad member received two and a half years for possessing materials for possible use in explosives; and a third person was sentenced to seven and a half years for shooting a gun and firebombing an Israeli bus.

In May 2004, Israeli television showed gunmen piling into an UNRWA ambulance.

UNRWA officials say it's unfair to tarnish an organization of thousands for the actions of a few. They also claim the Israeli judicial system is biased, with UNRWA denied access to both detainees and the evidence against them.

The most notorious instance occurred in early October 2004, when Israel announced it had footage of a Kassam rocket being loaded into an UNRWA ambulance. UNRWA asserted that the object in question was a rolled-up stretcher.

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'We don't want to be an agency that helps rebels who go out at night and fight.'

Astrid Van Genderen Stort
U.N. High Commission for Refugees

ARTS & CULTURE

Sarajevo Haggadah
being reproduced

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

VIENNA (JTA) — This Passover, reproductions of a well-known illuminated manuscript are going on sale — for \$1,350 apiece.

The Sarajevo Haggadah should be ready just before Passover, Bosnian Jewish leader Jakob Finci told JTA. “We are printing a limited edition of just 613 copies — the number of the mitzvot.”

The Sarajevo Haggadah has long been a symbol of Jewish presence — and survival — in the Balkans.

Handwritten and illuminated in 14th-century Spain, the lavishly illustrated 109-page manuscript was brought to Sarajevo after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and remained intact through years of conflict and upheaval.

It served countless family seders over the centuries, and wine stains mar some of the pages. Owned by the Bosnian National Museum since 1894, it escaped the Holocaust, hidden away in a remote mountain village. It also survived the brutal Bosnian War of the 1990s, either locked in a bank vault or stashed away in private custody.

In December 2002, the book went on display at the museum.

A full-scale copy of the Haggadah was published in the early 1980s, but it was printed on paper. The new edition is printed, like the original, on parchment, and bound with leather covers. Each copy is meant to be, as much as possible, a replica of the Haggadah itself.

“It will look exactly like the original,” Finci said.

The idea — and seed money — for the project came from James Wolfensohn, the past president of the World Bank.

Wolfensohn personally donated \$150,000 for the project. The edition’s publisher, RABIC of Sarajevo, provided further funding, and the project was also helped with a bank loan.

The Haggadah was created in about 1350, probably as a wedding gift, but it changed hands — and countries — a number of times over the centuries. The full details about how and when it arrived in Sarajevo are not known. It was sold to the Bosnian museum in 1894 by Joseph Kohen. ■

Continued from page 6

After further scrutiny, Israel conceded it had blundered: It was indeed a stretcher. But the incident reflected how, after years of tension with UNRWA, Israel was inclined to believe the worst about the agency.

Even UNRWA leaders, however, admit their camps are heavily militarized.

“Of course I don’t condone it, but it’s a fact of life,” Hansen said of the presence of heavily armed militants at an agency function, according to The Associated Press. “Look around the camp. We can’t stop it: We don’t have guns.”

As Hansen later confided to the Danish paper Politiken, “Who in this camp dares to speak up against an armed man?”

Though U.N. resolutions require armed elements to steer clear of refugee camps, Karen Koning AbuZayd conceded, in a 2002 Jerusalem Report interview, that expelling gunmen from the camps would be “difficult in this region.”

In Gaza and the West Bank, everything is “upside down. The refugees are the armed elements,” said AbuZayd, who at the time of the interview was Hansen’s deputy and who has now succeeded him.

Then there are instances of Palestinian violence that target UNRWA itself.

Last August, three UNRWA staffers — two Europeans and a Palestinian — were kidnapped in the Khan Younis camp in Gaza by what UNRWA described as a “militant group.” UNRWA protested, and the staffers were released later in the day, unharmed.

On New Year’s Day 2006, Palestinians firebombed the U.N. club in Gaza City, which flies the UNRWA flag and is said to be the only establishment in town that serves alcohol, drawing the ire of Islamic fundamentalists. The club’s guard was tied up and beaten.

UNRWA staffers who venture into the fray may risk repercussions.

In April 2004, Israel’s assassination of Hamas leaders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi sparked an outpouring of emotion among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

According to The Daily Star of Beirut, the UNRWA chief in Lebanon, Richard Cook, ordered his staff to go into agency schools and tear down posters glorifying

“martyrdom.” Refugee leaders declared Cook persona non grata and reportedly barred him briefly from the camps.

“We have to take the safety of our staff into account,” AbuZayd explained to the Report in her 2002 interview. “If we were to ask our staff to do certain things, we realize that would get them into big trouble.”

At the very least, the United States expects UNRWA to speak up. Washington is UNRWA’s largest donor, providing about 30 percent of the agency’s roughly \$400 million budget in both 2004 and 2005.

Section 301(c) of the 1961 U.S. Foreign Assistance Act compels UNRWA to “take all possible measures to assure that no part of the United States contribution shall be used to furnish assistance to any refugee who is receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army or any other guerrilla type organization or who has engaged in any act of terrorism.”

That pressure to vet seems to make the UNRWA hierarchy squirm.

In a November 2003 report, the U.S. General Accounting Office noted that UNRWA balked at the obligation to report what staff members see and hear, “owing to concerns for its staff’s safety” and the “inability to verify

beneficiary responses.”

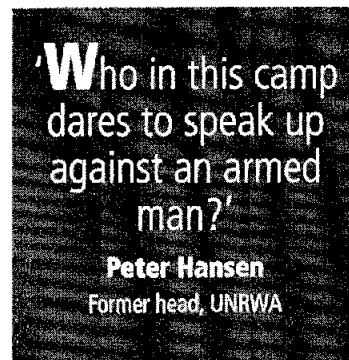
UNRWA’s lawyers countered with a proposal that staffers not “knowingly” provide assistance to those involved with terrorist activities — a standard that critics say allows for plausible deniability.

UNRWA camps also have seen a slew of “workplace accidents,” a euphemism for bombs that explode prematurely as terrorists prepare them.

“We talked to UNRWA about it, that if it happens that’s prima facie evidence the person was a terrorist,” a U.S. State Department official told JTA. “But UNRWA’s lawyer says, ‘Well, not really. It’s not a terrorist act simply to make a bomb.’”

“We say that’s really getting into the weeds legally,” the official continued. “We don’t know what other purposes they would be constructing a bomb for, and they fall into our definition for what ought to be excluded.”

“UNRWA agreed in the end, and one reason they did, frankly, is we’re the biggest donors and they don’t want to get into a spat with us.” ■



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Treasury bans Al-Manar

The U.S. Treasury placed Hezbollah's television affiliate on a terrorist watch list. Naming Al-Manar and its radio affiliate, Al-Nour, as global terrorist entities freezes the companies' U.S. assets and bans U.S. companies from doing business with them.

"Any entity maintained by a terrorist group — whether masquerading as a charity, a business or a media outlet — is as culpable as the terrorist group itself," Stuart Levey, the Treasury under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in a statement Thursday.

Al-Manar has been on a State Department watch list that bans its officials from entering the United States, but that listing was mostly symbolic.

Study: Anti-Semitism high in Canada

The number of anti-Semitic incidents remained high in Canada in 2005, according to a B'nai Brith Canada study.

The number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2005 was the second highest total in the audit's 23-year history. Some 829 incidents were reported in 2005, a slight decline from the 857 incidents reported in 2004, the highest number since the audit began.

The number of incidents has increased almost three-fold since 2001, B'nai Brith reports.

Israel Bonds changes bonds

Israel Bonds recently changed the denominations and length of its bonds. On March 1, Israel Bonds eliminated \$500 and \$1,000 bonds. The smallest denomination bond continues to be the \$100 Mazel Tov bond that matures in five years, but the next largest amount is now \$2,500, which matures in either two or 10 years. In addition, Israel Bonds has eliminated the zero coupon bond and modified its Jubilee series bonds, which sell for a minimum of \$25,000 and now mature in two, five, seven or 10 years. Joshua Matza, Israel Bonds' president and CEO, said staffing changes will come late next year as the organization responds to an Israeli government request to begin raising half of Israel's overseas borrowing needs by 2008.

MIDDLE EAST

Racial confrontation in Jaffa

Members of an Israeli party calling for Arabs to leave the Jewish state were threatened in a racially mixed town.

Several Herut activists visited Jaffa on Thursday to distribute leaflets promoting the "voluntary transfer" of Israeli Arabs.

They were besieged by several Arabs, some of them armed with bottles and knives, and had to be extracted by police.

Hours later, several Jews who arrived in Jaffa to stage a protest were similarly removed.

Israel biggest Mideast investor in U.S.

Israel is the largest Middle Eastern investor in the United States. The U.S. State Department published foreign investor rankings Wednesday.

Israel was first from the Middle East, with \$4.1 billion, followed by Kuwait, with \$1.2 billion. Those sums were dwarfed, however, by major European nations, which tended to top \$100 billion in investment. Britain is the largest single investor, at \$252 billion.

Gaza bombing foiled

Israeli forces killed three Palestinian terrorists along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip. The air force fired on a squad as its members

tried to plant a bomb on the Israeli patrol road near Gaza's Kissufim crossing Thursday.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility from Palestinian groups. On Wednesday, Israeli commandos captured three Fatah fugitives in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

According to security sources, one of the detainees had planned to carry out a suicide bombing.

Shas lawmaker quits

A senior lawmaker from Israel's Shas Party quit in a fraud scandal. Yair Peretz tendered his resignation Thursday after the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court found him guilty of obtaining a university degree by copying someone else's thesis.

Secular parties called on supporters of Shas and other religious parties to jump ship ahead of next week's election.

Oz helps political party

Amos Oz is helping the Meretz Party in the Israeli election campaign. The left-wing party announced Thursday that it would issue half-minute audio spots from the famous author that will be telephoned to the homes of potential voters or e-mailed to them. Also pitching in on Meretz's campaign is Shulamit Aloni, a former party leader.

WORLD

Step could affect stream's stance on gays

Conservative rabbis passed a motion that could make it easier to push through a change in the movement's approach to homosexuality. Rabbis meeting in Mexico City at the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, the movement's rabbinic arm, voted to lower the threshold needed to enact a takanah, a rabbinic legal term referring to a ruling that changes existing law.

Insiders say that one of four opinions on the movement's approach to homosexuality under consideration by the assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, the movement's central legal authority, likely would require a takanah.

That opinion favors liberalizing the movement's take on gays and lesbians and would lead to allowing gays to be ordained as rabbis. Since 2005, takanot have required an 80 percent super-majority in the law committee for passage, but the new motion lowers the threshold to a simple majority of 13 of the committee's 25 voting members.

The law committee meets again in December.

German puts onus on Palestinians

Palestinians hold the key to Mideast peace, Germany's foreign minister said.

"Realistically, with the victory of Hamas, a solution to the conflict has become very difficult," Frank-Walter Steinmeier said at a gala dinner in Berlin marking the 100th anniversary of the American Jewish Committee.

Steinmeier added that Germany insists on Hamas recognizing Israel, renouncing violence and accepting previous treaties the Palestinian Authority signed with the Jewish state.

Several hundred guests, including a large delegation of AJCommittee members, attended Wednesday's event in the former East Berlin.

The event also marked 60 years of the organization's relations with postwar Germany, and the eighth anniversary of the AJCommittee office in Berlin.

Additional centennial celebrations are planned for Israel and Washington.