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Candle lighting time Friday is 5:07 p.m.
Shabbat ends at 6:09 p.m.



Time out
Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his wife Nava at the Havat Hanoar Ha'Sinai School in Jerusalem January 21. "My assessment was that the Taba talks would not produce an agreement, Barak said last Sunday, explaining his government's decision to break off peace negotiations with the Palestinians until after the February 6 election. Copyright: Israelnet.

Taba talks end without deal

No more contacts before vote

By NAOMI SEGAL

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With elections for prime minister barely a week away, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak filled in his Cabinet on the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority on Saturday ended a week of negotiations at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba, with officials from the two sides saying they had "never been closer" to an accord.

Officials from both sides said they were confident an agreement could be reached if negotiations resumed after Israel's Feb. 6 election for prime minister.

On Sunday, a day after the Taba talks ended, Barak briefed his Cabinet.

While he did not reveal extensive details, Barak said Palestinian negotiators for the first time agreed to the existence of Israeli settlements in any final peace accord.

Barak said Sunday the Palestinian team had been willing to let Israel keep clusters of West Bank land containing some 50 percent to 60 percent of the settler population, but Israel stood firm on keeping at least 80 percent of the settlers in place.

"My assessment from the outset had been that the Taba talks would not produce an agreement," Barak told his ministers. "But we had to know how far we could get in negotiations before the elections. We are closer than ever to an agreement with the Palestinians."

Barak confirmed that contacts were under way for him to meet in Stockholm this week with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

But later Sunday, Barak's office issued a statement saying the premier would "not continue with diplomatic contacts with Arafat and his people until after the elections in Israel."

The two sides will continue to maintain "security contacts for calming the situation on the ground," the statement said.

On Sunday, Arafat and Israeli Cabinet minister Shimon Peres appeared on a panel at an important economic summit in Davos, Switzerland.

Arafat delivered a blistering condemnation of Israel to an audience that included U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Israel is waging "a savage and barbaric war as well as a blatant and fascist military aggression against our Palestinian people," Arafat said, according to Reuters.

He also accused Israel of using weapons containing depleted uranium on the Palestinians, something the Israeli army has roundly denied.

Peres, whose opening comments were far more conciliatory, was taken aback by Arafat's attack.

"Let's walk the last piece of the road for peace and have it," he implored Arafat. "Your children will be happy and our children will be happy."

Arafat's accusations contrasted sharply with the tone at a joint news conference summing up the six days of negotiations at Taba, at which the heads of the Israeli and Palestinian teams said the sides had held serious discussions but were unable to close the gaps before Israel's elections.

(Cont. on page 17. See "Barak breaks off peace talks".)

Executive director takes government job

Vaad transfers MBK logo, licensees to volunteer group

By MATT BELLAN

A lawyer Winnipeg's Vaad Ha'ir flew in from Israel last summer to serve as its executive director has moved on to a government job.

Gary Dolovich started his new job as a "legal researcher" with the provincial government January 31, after telling the vaad board last fall that he was cutting back his hours there to part-time. He added that he would be leaving that job early in 2001.

Dolovich, who lived in Winnipeg before moving to Israel, where he practised law, declined comment last Monday on his reasons for leaving the vaad after only six months, saying he was pressed for time.

His departure follows the vaad's decision to put its new "MBK" (Manitoba Kosher) hechsher (kashrut seal of approval) on hold for a few years. That move came after the vaad failed to convince major food suppliers and manufacturers under the vaad's existing "WK" hechsher to switch over to MBK - at least not in the immediate future.

The vaad set up the MBK hechsher partly to ensure some of the more Orthodox families in the Jewish community that products of vaad-licensed bakeries, butchers, caterers and other food suppliers are kosher. They've been skeptical about that, and have been importing much of their food from Toronto and other cities.

Rabbi Yaacov Benamou is spiritual leader of Herzlia Synagogue, and one of three Orthodox rabbis the vaad asked to oversee introduction of the MBK hechsher. He said Dolovich's commitment was "to the MBK", and if the MBK hechsher wasn't going to continue under the vaad, "he wasn't interested in participating. He's an observant person."

The Jewish Post & News also learned this week that the vaad incurred costs for severance pay when it laid off its previous executive director, who'd been working there part-time.

Don Aronovitch, president of the vaad, told The Jewish Post & News last Monday that the vaad was granted a loan from the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg/Combined Jewish Appeal last fall of "approximately \$22,000", to help cover the cost of switching over from the WK to the MBK hechsher.

"We will begin repaying the total loan in 2002, and have it fully repaid in three years," he added.

In the meantime, the vaad will continue looking at ways of expanding the number of licensees willing to come under the MBK hechsher. They're not opposed to doing that in principle, Aronovitch said. They're concerned about the cost of the changes they'd have to make, to satisfy the rabbis overseeing the hechsher.

Robert Freedman, executive vice-president of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg/Combined Jewish Appeal, last Monday said the loan to the vaad is for "\$26,000".

Asked how the vaad can afford to pay that, when it was on the verge of bankruptcy - a major reason for the move to the MBK hechsher - Freedman said the vaad now is "balancing its books". "They've reduced their administrative costs. They no longer have a paid executive director. (The vaad has advertised, instead, for a less expensive "administrative assistant.) For the first time in years, the vaad has also increased the fees it charges licensees.

Meanwhile, Yossi Cohen, president of Herzlia Synagogue, has taken over from the vaad the responsibility of administering the MBK hechsher, on a "private", voluntary basis. Benamou, Rabbi Moshe Stern and Rabbi Avrohom Altein had previously been volunteering with the vaad, to oversee introduction of the MBK hechsher. They will continue doing that for the private MBK hechsher.



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