



ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

Issue Number 29
October 2009

Israel and Sweden At Odds Over “Blood Libel” Accusation of IDF Organ Thefts

Italy: EU Should Condemn Swedish Organ Theft Article

Italy’s foreign minister, Franco Frattini, says he has met with his Swedish counterpart, Carl Bildt, to iron out a strategy for resolving the fallout from an article published in the Aftonbladet newspaper, which reported allegations that the Israeli army harvested the organs of dead Palestinians. Bildt has denied that the two discussed the crisis.

Frattini said the two agreed that at an upcoming meeting of European Union foreign ministers they will work to pass a resolution making it clear that the EU, under the Swedish presidency, strongly condemns anti-Semitism. Frattini said the accusations made in the Aftonbladet article are “terrible conclusions, lying and hurtful, and they have the power to assist all those who seek to incite against Jews or who oppose the existence of the State of Israel.”

“Every initiative against anti-Semitism is welcome,” said an Israeli ministry spokesman. “But if the declaration is general and does not specifically relate to the article, it will not resolve anything.”

Israel has urged the Swedish government to condemn an article recently published in a Swedish newspaper that accused the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of harvesting organs from Palestinians wounded or killed by soldiers.

The furor over the article gathered into a diplomatic storm centering around questions of anti-Semitism and freedom of speech. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told ministers at a cabinet meeting that the article, published in the Swedish daily newspaper Aftonbladet, was “outrageous” and compared it to a “blood libel,” referring to medieval anti-Semitic accusations that Jews ritually killed gentile children and collected their blood. The article, by the Swedish journalist Donald Bostrom, ran in the newspaper on Aug. 17. It was based on accusations Mr. Bostrom heard from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in the 1990s, which he published in a book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2001.

“We are not asking the government of Sweden for an apology,” Mr. Netanyahu said. “We are asking for their condemnation. We are not asking from them anything we do not ask of ourselves.” While Mr. Netanyahu made his comments behind closed doors, other Israeli ministers publicly attacked the Swedish government’s refusal to take an official stand against the article. Avigdor Lieberman, Israel’s outspoken foreign minister, led the protest saying that the Swedish government’s silence was “reminiscent of Sweden’s position during World War II, when it also did not become involved.”

Sweden currently holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, and its foreign minister, Carl Bildt, had been scheduled to visit Israel during September but the visit was cancelled. Mr. Bildt rejected Israeli calls for an official condemnation of the article saying freedom of expression was part of the Swedish Constitution. Sweden’s ambassador to Israel, Elisabet Borsiin Bonnier, issued a statement calling the Aftonbladet article “shocking and appalling,” sharing the dismay of the Israeli government and public. The Swedish Foreign Ministry subsequently disavowed her denunciation, however.

Antagonism between Israel and Sweden increased in light of evidence that Sweden’s government assisted in funding the “research” for the story. News of the funding was broken by the Israeli newspaper, Maariv, when it reported that most of the material in the controversial article appeared in the book written in 2001 by the author of the article. The book, entitled Inshallah, was funded by various bodies, including the Foreign Ministry of Sweden.

In January, Israel had another unpleasant experience with Swedish journalism when Islamists fired rockets and threw pipe-bombs at pro-Israel demonstrators in the Swedish city of Malmö. In its coverage of the incident, southern Sweden’s largest newspaper, Sydsvenskan, reported that “violence did not occur.”

Editorial:

As this issue goes to press, the High Holidays are rapidly approaching and we are entering another year of publishing *Israel Matters!* Our philosophy is to approach each issue as a way to reinforce the message that Israel is a vibrant country to which we as American Jews are inextricably joined. In the limited space available, we try to present a sampling of articles that have appeared in the media that are reflective of the geo-political issues affecting Israel, those that highlight the science and technology for which that small country is justifiably famous, and some that are offered merely to illustrate the vitality of contemporary Israel. All in all, the preparation of *Israel Matters!* is a labor of love, one in which we hope you share our continuing enthusiasm.

L'Shana Tovah Tikatevu,

Ed and Randy Berns, Co-Chairs, TBS Israel Affairs Committee

Madonna Tours Jewish Holy Sites in Jerusalem

The "Material Girl" opened her recent visit to Israel with a spiritual touch. Madonna went to Jerusalem's Old City where she toured an ancient tunnel near the Western Wall.



U.S. singer Madonna, center, arrives to visit the Western Wall tunnels, Judaism's holiest site, as the Western Wall is seen in the background, in Jerusalem's Old City.

The 51-year-old pop star arrived in a black Mercedes van and was escorted into the tunnel by police. She made no comment to reporters and was whisked away about a half hour later. Madonna isn't Jewish, but she's a follower of Jewish mysticism and has even taken the Hebrew name Esther.

She arrived in Israel for a pair of concerts on her Sticky and Sweet tour.

Madonna brought her mix of provocative music and spirituality with a concert in front of 50,000 fans who had endured a 16-year wait since the pop icon's last gig in Israel.

Israeli radio stations played Madonna songs through the day and recorded Madonna tunes greeted concertgoers as they lined up to enter the concert grounds. On Israel's Army Radio, a DJ interrupted a song briefly to quip that "tonight, Aunt Esther is playing at Hayarkon Park."

"I shouldn't have stayed so long away," Madonna told the adoring crowd midway through the show, as she broke away from the script to express her affection for the country. "Every time I come here, I get so supercharged with energy," she said. "I truly believe that Israel is the energy center of the world."

Facebook Prevents Israelis in Golan from Identifying Selves as Living in Israel

Although the Golan falls under Israeli law, residents of the region wishing to write "Israel" in the Hometown section of their Facebook profiles were not given the option. Instead, residents of Jewish towns, including Qazrin, Ramat Magshimim, Geshur, Mevo Hanna, and Had Nes were only given the option of writing "Syria" in their Hometown section.

▼ Basic Information

Sex: Male

Show my sex in my profile

Birthday: Jan 17 1976

Show only month & day in my profile.

Hometown: Ramat Magshimim

Home Neighborhood: Ramat Magshimim, Israel

Family Members: Ramat Magshimim, Syria

Facebook profile screen showing Syria as default

Facebook users protested its decision to define the national origin of Golan residents. They argued at the very least, Facebook should include the option of writing "Israel" in the hometown section, as it has done with Jewish residents of the West Bank.

In about two weeks, more than 2,500 Facebook users responded by urging Facebook for a change of policy. Apparently, Facebook heard their voices. As a result, Facebook has changed its settings and now applies the same policy for Golan residents as it does for the West Bank. When people scroll down, they will see the name of the town with Israel written below it, identifying it as part of Israel.

However, just as with the West Bank, Golan residents still cannot choose to have the word "Israel" appear in the Hometown line.

Israeli Science & Technology

Regrowing Blood Vessels in Human Heart May Render Bypass Surgery History

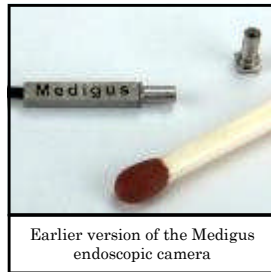
In a groundbreaking discovery that may eventually render bypass surgery history, researchers at Tel Aviv University have shown that an injected protein can regrow blood vessels in the human heart. In heart disease, blood vessels are either clogged or die off, starving the heart of oxygen and leaving it highly susceptible to a cardiac attack.

Dr. Britta Hardy of TAU's Sackler School of Medicine and her team of researchers have developed a protein-based injection that when delivered straight to muscles in the body, sparks the regrowth of tiny blood vessels. The new vessels in the heart could give millions of people around the world a new lease on life.

"The biotechnology behind our human-based protein therapy is very complicated, but the goal is simple and the solution is straightforward. We intend to inject our drug locally to heal any oxygen-starved tissue," said Hardy. The researchers posited that proteins from the human body could be used to trigger the growth of new blood vessels. "Our technology promises to regrow blood vessels like a net, and a heart that grows more blood vessels becomes stronger. It's now imaginable that peptide injections may replace bypass surgeries," said Hardy. The study has been published in *Biochemical Pharmacology*.

Israel Developing World's Smallest Camera

Two Israeli companies - medical device company Medigus and specialty foundry company Tower Semiconductor - have announced their collaboration on the world's smallest medical video camera.



Earlier version of the Medigus endoscopic camera

Based on advanced complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) technology, the sophisticated tiny camera will be used for disposable endoscopes and various medical and surgical purposes. Medigus, experts in the miniaturization of diagnostic and surgical tools and Tower, a leading specialty semiconductor manufacturer and foremost CMOS image sensor provider, expect the innovation will lower the cost of endoscopic and other diagnostic procedures, as well as improve curative treatments.

The companies released a joint press release in which they touted the product as "offer[ing] a high performance product at a low cost and combining superb sensitivity, resolution and dynamic versatility, allowing customers a variety of potential medical applications in growing markets such as Gastroenterology, Natural Orifice Transluminal Endoscopy Surgery, Bronchoscopy, Orthopedics, and ENT."

The mini-cameras will measure a mere 700 by 700 microns, or about seven times the width of a human hair. Because they will be created for one-time use, they will not need to be sterilized after performing their work.

The first samples have already been distributed, with mass production expected to begin in the middle of 2010. The camera's sensor will be manufactured at one of Tower's two Israeli factories using a 0.18-micron CMOS image sensor process and implanted in cameras produced at Medigus's facilities.

Medigus CEO, Dr. Elazar Sonnenschein, called the new camera a "dramatic breakthrough", saying the smallest-ever camera will enable procedures not previously achievable, "giving both physicians and patients the most cost-effective level of technology, without compromising the quality of treatment which they deserve."

Technion Scientists Create Breath Test for Cancer Detection

Scientists at the Technion in Haifa have created a device that they hope will be able to detect cancer with a simple breath test. In an initial trial, the "breathalyzer" test was able to detect lung cancer with 86 percent accuracy. The new device was revealed in the journal *Nature Nanotechnology*. Researchers hope the test will provide a simple, cost-effective and non-invasive method of detecting cancer. In addition, the test is capable of detecting cancers that are not yet large enough to show up on X-rays or CT scans, allowing for earlier diagnosis that could save lives.

The system works by testing for chemicals that tend to be present in lungs affected by cancer but not in healthy lungs. The Technion team decided to test for four such chemicals: ethylbenzene, decane, heptanol, and trimethylbenzene. A patient's breath is sent over a circuit made of silicon embedded with gold nanoparticles. If the breath contains the organic compounds common to cancer sufferers, the circuit's electrical resistance will change.

The test works on patients who have recently ingested alcohol, food, coffee, or tobacco. Previous versions required patients to abstain before the test to avoid false results. The device must pass further clinical trials before being put to use, at which point scientists will face the challenge of creating versions of the test that are simple and inexpensive enough to be used in day-to-day practice in hospitals and clinics.