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News Briefs

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Israel's *Waltz with Bashir* nominated for Oscars

Jan. 23 - Israeli movie, *Waltz with Bashir*, an animated film depicting the 1982 Lebanon War, has been officially nominated for best foreign-language prize at the Oscars. The award ceremony will be held on February 22. The Israeli movie, directed by Ari Folman, will be competing with French director Laurent Cantet's *The Class*, Germany's *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, Austria's *Revanche* and Japan's *Departures*. Earlier this month, *Waltz with Bashir* won best foreign film at the 66th Golden Globes ceremony in Hollywood. The film traces Folman's journey to regain his lost memories as an Israeli soldier during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The film is officially banned in Lebanon, but was seen at a screening in Beirut last week.

Israeli student collects 10 truckloads of supplies for people of Gaza

Jan. 22 - An Israeli student from Sapir College near Sderot has collected 10 truckloads of basic supplies as part of a humanitarian effort to help the people of Gaza. Twenty-five-year-old, Hadas Balas, was inspired to take action after visiting her college last week, and hearing the sound of bombs exploding in Gaza, at the same time that sirens rang out in Sderot. She and a friend, Lee Ziv, 27, wrote emails asking people to make donations to the people of Gaza. Human rights organizations passed the appeal on to their own email lists. A number of non-profit organizations joined the effort, volunteering to help collect clothes, blankets and basic supplies. The Jerusalem branch of Hashomer Hatzair, the Zionist youth movement's organization, and the Greek Catholic Church's Beit Hacheshed in Haifa helped collect supplies.

International belly dancing festival opens in Eilat

Jan. 22 - Eilat plays host to the fifth annual International Belly Dance Festival this weekend. The three-day event, which begins today, is to be held at the Golden Tulip Club Hotel and brings together belly dancers from all over Europe and Asia, including Belgium, France, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Russia and Germany.. The festival includes workshops, performances and a competition. International experts will teach classes of all levels, and in the evenings visiting artists will hold performances. Egyptian belly dancer, Magdy el Leisy will take part in the event for the first time.

Medical Tourism Association opens Israeli branch

Jan. 22 - The US-based Medical Tourism Association (MTA) today announced the establishment of an Israeli branch. MTA Israel will serve as an umbrella organization for the sector and will work with US health insurers and medical travel agents to promote Israel as a preferred destination for North American patients seeking a high level of care at a reasonable price. The initiative to establish MTA Israel came through medical device importer ISI, which held a conference in Tel Aviv today at which MTA senior executives made presentations to representatives from Israel's hospitals, HMOs and the Ministry of Health; during their stay they also visited hospitals, clinics and the Ministry of Tourism. The MTA delegation will next visit Jordan.

Allium gets CE Mark for revolutionary prostatic stent

Jan. 22 - The Allium Group, developer and manufacturer of innovative stents for the urinary, gastro-intestinal, pulmonary and peripheral vascular tracts, announced today that it has been awarded CE mark for its prostatic stent enabling commercialization of the system in the EU and other countries recognizing the CE Mark. Allium Medical has had a great deal of success in Europe with its biliary and ureteral stents. Allium's prostatic stents, used in patients with Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH or enlarged prostate) or those with advanced prostate cancer. They are long-term temporary stents whose triangular cross-section closely matches the contours of the human anatomy, as opposed to standard cylindrical stents, offering greater patient comfort. These stents are revolutionary in that they allow for a minimally invasive ambulatory procedure with immediate results; can be inserted for up to 12 months and are easily removed.

Mekorot plans \$400m Ashdod seawater desalination plant

Jan. 22 - Mekorot Development & Enterprise, a subsidiary of Mekorot, the Israeli National Water Company, is preparing to issue an international tender for the construction of a seawater desalination plant in Ashdod. Details of the project were presented today at a pre-tender conference attended by multinational and local infrastructure companies. The \$400 million 25-year build-operate-transfer (BOT) contract is for a desalination facility capable of producing 100 million cubic meters of water per annum. Mekorot is also soliciting offers for project funding, which it hopes to close by the end of 2009. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2012. Israel's Ashkelon seawater reverse osmosis plant is currently the largest in the world.

Israeli city begins recycling plastic bags

Jan. 21 - Ra'anana has become the first municipality in Israel to introduce a scheme to collect and recycle plastic bags. Under this first-of-a-kind scheme, 25 special containers have been placed across the city and the public has been invited to toss different types of plastic bags into them. The bags will be collected by Amnir Recycling Industries, which will then shred, wash and break down the bags to create a raw material. This material can be used to create products like buckets, tubes, electric cables and garden furniture. Up to now recycling of plastic bags has not taken place in Israel because it is an unprofitable move for a commercial company.

Israeli artists hold fundraising concert for Gaza victims

Jan. 21 - Israeli musicians and singers are to hold a fundraising concert in Tel Aviv on Friday to raise money for the Gazan victims of Operation Cast Lead. The event, called "Muses won't remain silent" will feature Jewish and Israeli artists like Jaffa hip-hop group, System Ali, Israel's 2009 Eurovision representatives, Noa and Mira Awad, who will perform with singers Gil Dor, Rona Keinan, Shlomi Shaban, Eran Zur, Rafi Perski, Khalas' Bassam Beromi, bassist Yehu Yaron, and singer Noa Golandski. All proceeds of the evening will go towards purchasing medical equipment and medicine to be transferred to the Gaza Strip. In an article in *Ynetnews* singer Noa Golandski said: "This is not an act that supports Hamas, heaven forbid. This is not a statement against the government's policies or the military strategy. But simply, if we can collect money to help people live their lives, this is our duty as human beings, not as Israelis."

Israel's Optibase to supply solutions to the US government for worldwide deployment

Jan. 20 - A branch of the US government has deployed IPTV solutions developed by Israeli company Optibase, a leading provider of mission critical video solutions, the company announced today. The solutions, which are to be used for strategic worldwide deployments, are based on Optibase MGW encoding and streaming platforms and the EZ TV video portal. "We are honored to support the United States government and its representatives around the world," said Joseph (Yossi) Aloni, president of Optibase. In addition to this project, in the past 12 months Optibase has deployed multiple projects with hundreds of channels for the United States government, army and other agencies.

Israel's Teva to collaborate with Swiss company Lonza in biogenetics

Jan. 20 - Israeli giant, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries has set up a joint venture to develop, manufacture and market biosimilars of selected biologic pharmaceuticals with Swiss company, the Lonza Group. According to Teva, the collaboration will advance the efforts of both Teva and the Lonza Group to secure a leading position in the emerging biosimilars market by merging their complimentary capabilities. Teva president and CEO Shlomo Yanai said: "We had identified biosimilars as a major growth driver for Teva in our long-term strategy and have been augmenting our knowledge base, capabilities and infrastructure to position Teva as a leader in this market. This strategic partnership bolsters our biologics capabilities." The new venture will be launched in the first quarter of this year. No financial details of the deal were released.

Ben-Gurion University partners with Primafuel Partners with on international algae biorefinery program

Jan. 19 - Primafuel, a company focused on the development and commercialization of technology and infrastructure for low-carbon fuels, is partnering with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Microalgal Biotechnology Laboratory (MBL) in an international algae biorefinery program. Primafuel holds an exclusive licensing agreement with the MBL on its photobioreactor work and strain selection, as well as any biofuels and coproducts technology developed in the future. MBL has been engaged in algae research for more than three decades, and has a successful record of commercializing algae production systems for the feed and nutraceutical markets. Primafuel's biorefinery technology team, with labs in California and Europe, has developed multiple technology platforms focused on the separation, purification, and conversion of products from biomass. The partnership with MBL will focus on producing high-value algae strains.

Israeli high-tech capital raising in 2008 reaches 8-year high of \$2.08b

Jan. 19 - 483 Israeli high-tech companies raised \$2.08 billion from local and foreign venture investors, 18% above the \$1.76 billion raised in 2007 and 28% above 2006 according to the IVC Research Center annual survey for 2008, released today. Q4 2008 was affected by the global economic crisis, with 109 Israeli high-tech companies raised \$394 million, which is 22% below the \$503 million raised in the Q4 2007, and 34% below the \$600 million raised in the Q3 2008, the highest third quarter reported in the last eight years. "2009 will be a tough year for all companies," said IVC chairman Zeev Holtzman, "but Israeli high-tech industry will continue to be a highly abundant source of technology innovation." The survey is based on reports from 82 venture investors of which 48 are Israeli management companies and 34 are other ? mostly foreign ? investment entities. The complete survey will be published in the IVC 2009 Yearbook, due April 2009.

Israel's largest-ever natural gas reserve discovered off coast of Haifa

Jan. 18 - Israeli oil company Isramco announced today that it has discovered "extremely significant" reserves of natural gas at its Tamar 1 offshore drill site off Israel's Mediterranean coast. This is the largest reserve of natural gas ever to be discovered in Israel, and is three times bigger than that of the Yam Thetis consortium. The company began drilling at the site 90 kilometers west of Haifa in October last year at a cost of \$144.5 million. In a statement, the company said that it believes the estimated reserves of natural gas could increase as further data comes in. Tamar is a joint venture between Isramco, which owns a 28.9 percent stake, US company Noble Energy (36%), Delek Drilling and Avner Oil and Dor Gas Exploration. Drilling at the site will not be easy. The sea floor is 1,700 meters below the surface of the water and a thick stratum of salt lies under the sand. The drill at the Tamar 1 permit site reaches 5,000 meters below sea level.

Israeli scientists develop mini-submarine that can seek out and target cancer cells in the body

Jan. 18 - Israeli scientists have developed a 'mini-submarine' device that can search out and target cancer cells in the body, increasing the efficiency of cancer treatments while leaving non-cancerous cells untouched. The biological nano-machine developed by researchers from Tel Aviv University could be ready for clinical trials in humans within three years. The nano-sized device is made from biological materials and can deliver effective drugs to kill cancer cells and eradicate faulty proteins, treating the source of the disease, not the symptoms. The research by Dr. Dan Peer was published recently in *Science*. In the report Peer reported on the device's ability to target immune cells in the guts of mice with ulcerative colitis. Large pharmaceutical companies have already expressed interest in this research, and Peer and his team are collaborating with researchers from Harvard University and MIT, and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at Harvard Medical School.

Israel to open emergency treatment center at Erez Crossing for Gaza civilians

Jan. 18 - Israel will today open a forward emergency treatment center at the Erez crossing into Gaza to treat Palestinian civilians hurt in the conflict with Israel. The treatment center, which is to be opened in the presence of Minister of Welfare and Social Services Isaac Herzog and Minister of Health Yacov Ben Yizri, will be fully equipped and staffed by medical personnel, including specialists in trauma, orthopedics, pediatric medicine, family medicine, and gynecology. The Israel Ministry of Health, through Magen David Adom, will operate the emergency treatment center. According to understandings reached between the Israeli ministries of welfare and health, and the Red Cross, injured civilians will be brought from Gaza to hospitals in Israel, according to their medical condition. Israeli hospitals have been preparing to accept these new patients. The field hospital is part of an effort by the Israeli government to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza's civilian population.

