



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Jewish state was willing to renew negotiations with Syria at any time. The premier also said he would allow an additional 5,000 Palestinian workers into Israel. [Page 4]

■ Hezbollah gunmen attacked an Israeli outpost in southern Lebanon, wounding two soldiers, security sources said. The soldiers were airlifted to Israel for treatment. [Page 4]

■ Congress approved funding for the FBI to open offices in four cities abroad, including Tel Aviv and Cairo. Clinton hailed the move as an important step that will aid intelligence-sharing and cooperation against terrorism.

■ President Clinton signed a bill imposing sanctions on foreign companies that invest in oil sectors in Iran or Libya. The United States charges that the two countries are state sponsors of terrorism. France warned that the European Union would retaliate against what it termed a unilateral U.S. decision.

■ A Canadian federal court ruled that Toronto-based Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel can reapply for Canadian citizenship. [Page 3]

■ Israel's Supreme Court rejected a petition by Yigal Amir challenging the life sentence handed down for assassinating Yitzhak Rabin. [Page 2]

■ The West Bank town of Ramallah was declared a closed military zone and off-limits to Israelis while Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat held talks there. He is scheduled to hold a Palestinian Council meeting Tuesday in Ramallah to discuss the recent riots in Tulkarm and Nablus.

■ The United States is checking whether tens of millions of dollars it received from Switzerland after World War II was money that the Nazis seized from Jews and other war victims, U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat reportedly said. He said the money was transferred to the United States after the war under an agreement with the Swiss government.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Can Dole woo Jewish voters? Convention could be first step

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Can Bob Dole win the race for the White House without increasing his support among American Jews?

Definitely not, according to an official with the Republican's presidential campaign.

"Bob Dole cannot win in November unless he makes significant inroads into President Clinton's Jewish support at the polls," said the official, who asked not to be named.

On the eve of the Republican convention in San Diego, Dole's prospects in the Jewish community remain far from certain. But the Republican candidate for president is ready to go head-to-head with Clinton for the Jewish vote.

No one expects that the majority of American Jews, a traditionally solid base of Democratic support, will switch allegiance come Election Day.

But Jewish Republicans are looking for a comeback from the last presidential election, when Clinton garnered about 80 percent of the Jewish vote.

They believe that if the race tightens — as they hope it will — Jewish support for Dole could provide the necessary margin of victory in several swing states.

But the rise or fall of Dole's candidacy, say campaign officials, hinges on the GOP's performance next week in San Diego, the site of the Republicans' weeklong nominating convention.

Party officials have carefully orchestrated four days of sessions to aid Dole's quest to win support from independents, party moderates and swing voters — all groups that include many American Jews and that are crucial to his election hopes.

The plan is to avoid the "trap" of the Republicans' 1992 Houston convention, which began the unraveling of moderate support for President Bush, said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican Jewish group.

Four years ago, Patrick Buchanan and the right wing of the party appeared to dominate the GOP's message. Amid calls for a "religious war," an attack on feminism and enthusiastic support for a constitutional ban on abortions, many moderates, including Jewish voters, deserted the party.

This year, "the convention will shun Pat Buchanan and celebrate diversity in the party," said Brooks, whose group will spearhead Jewish events at the convention, including special briefings and receptions.

In addition, the Republican platform is expected to reach out to abortion rights advocates by including some expression of tolerance for those who do not believe that the government should forbid abortions in all cases, including rape and incest.

'A big plus for Dole's appeal'

For Republican and undecided Jewish voters, this strategy could prove crucial.

Buchanan had a "devastating effect on Jewish voters in 1992," said A. Mark Neuman, a Dole supporter and former Reagan White House official.

The way Dole has handled Buchanan this year "is a big plus for Dole's appeal to the Jewish community," he said, referring to Dole's decision to exclude the former presidential hopeful from the convention stage.

After the convention, Dole is expected to woo Jewish voters directly through his "Jewish Americans for Dole Coalition."

At least one-third of the members of Dole's finance committee are American Jews active in Republican politics. Headed by veteran Jewish communal leader Max Fisher of Detroit, the committee has already raised millions for Dole's election, according to a campaign official involved in fund raising.

Jewish issues inside the campaign could also benefit from the sensitive ear of Wayne Berman, who will head the vice presidential nominee's campaign.

A former Bush administration official, Berman, a businessman from

Rochester, N.Y., is active with the pro-Israel political action committee, National PAC.

Republicans say Dole needs to almost double the Jewish support that George Bush received in 1992 to win states crucial to his election strategy.

"We will win or lose the election in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan and Illinois," said a Dole campaign official.

"All levels of the campaign are aware these states have significant Jewish populations."

For Dole's backers, New Jersey highlights the importance the Jewish vote can play.

Clinton won electorally rich New Jersey in 1992 with a margin widely attributed to the Jewish support he received at the ballot box.

If Dole can close the gap in the polls, the choice of Jewish voters — Jews make up 5.5 percent of the state's total population, according to the American Jewish Year Book — could provide the margin of victory to either candidate.

Although Jewish support for the Democratic presidential candidate reached near-record numbers in 1992, Jews identifying themselves as Republicans continue to increase.

"When the National Jewish Coalition was founded, we could fit all the Jewish Republicans in a telephone booth," said Sam Fox, national co-chairman of Dole's finance committee and an honorary chairman of the NJC. "Now we need at least a small conference hall."

'We have no delusions'

Still, campaign officials acknowledge that they have a tough road ahead.

"We have no delusions. Clinton is well-liked in the Jewish community," a Dole campaign official said, echoing the sentiments of many Jewish Republicans.

So among Jews, who continue to participate in the political process in large numbers, the race will come down to the issues of the day, Jewish Republicans predict.

Mirroring the Republican Party faithful, Dole's Jewish supporters diverge on the issues they believe will capture the electorate, including the Jewish vote.

For Fox, it's the economy.

"When it's all boiled down, the economy is what the voters are going to look at," Fox said. "And hands down, more and more people, being Jewish or otherwise, will vote for Dole."

"Lower taxes are important regardless of ethnic background," he said, referring to Dole's economic plan released this week that calls for an across-the-board 15 percent tax cut and includes many other tax-saving incentives.

Others believe that Dole can attract Jewish support through his support for increased defense spending.

"If Dole wins, the United States will build a missile defense system. And one of the primary beneficiaries will be Israel," said Douglas Feith, chairman of Dole's Middle East policy group.

"This is of such overriding importance it would be reason enough for one concerned about Israel's security to support Dole," said Feith, who served as a deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration.

Dole plans to tout the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship in his outreach to Jews, but he will also have to overcome a mixed record on the Jewish state.

Advisers say Dole would have warm relations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, some of whose economic and foreign policy ideologies closely mirror those of the Republicans.

Although Dole called in 1990 for a cut in Israel's foreign aid and lambasted congressional efforts to move the

U.S. Embassy in Israel, he has embraced issues championed by the pro-Israel community in more recent years.

Before leaving the Senate, Dole last year led the effort to pass legislation recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and calling for the State Department to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

On the domestic front, issues such as his opposition to racial quotas and support for school-choice programs could win support from segments of the American Jewish electorate.

Dole could also make inroads in the Orthodox community, which tends to support Republican candidates in higher numbers than the non-Orthodox and secular segments of the Jewish community.

"Dole's message will resonate in the Jewish community as it does with the rest of America," Brooks said. "After the convention, there won't be a dead heat, but we'll be on our way." □

Court rejects appeal to reverse life sentence of Rabin's assassin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Supreme Court has rejected a petition by Yigal Amir challenging the life sentence handed down against him earlier this year for assassinating Yitzhak Rabin.

In its unanimous decision, the three-judge panel said this week that there was no doubt the former law student had murdered Rabin.

They called the assassination a "villainous act" and rejected the claims of Amir's lawyers that a second, unknown gunman shot Rabin, calling the assertions "fictional detective stories."

Amir, a religious Jew, had admitted during his trial that he shot Rabin as he left a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv.

He said he intended only to paralyze the Israeli leader. But, he added, he was happy when he learned Rabin died.

Amir sought religious justification for his act, saying that he believed that Rabin's peace policies with the Palestinians were endangering Jewish lives.

Amir was not at Sunday's ruling.

In a letter to the justices, Amir said he was on a hunger strike to protest his prison conditions and that the journey to the Jerusalem courthouse would be "too taxing."

Amir's sister, Hadas, said, "There is no justice, or attempt to be objective," in the case.

"They gave him the life sentence, but the prison authorities have given him the death sentence," she told Israel Radio.

In March, the Tel Aviv District Court sentenced Amir to life in prison for assassinating Rabin.

Amir is also a defendant in a second trial, along with his brother, Hagai, and a friend, Dror Adani, on charges of plotting to kill Rabin.

A verdict in that case is expected in September.

In a separate development, Israeli prison authorities last week discovered electrical cords and other materials that could be used to make explosives in the prison cell of Hagai Amir. Acting on a tip, prison authorities searched Amir's cell and found electrical wiring, pages from physics and chemistry textbooks, and sketches of electric circuits.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani ordered an investigation into how Amir acquired the materials.

Hagai Amir was arrested a day after his younger brother carried out the assassination. Investigators later discovered grenades and explosives that Hagai Amir had stockpiled in the family's home. □

Suit against Christian Coalition reminds Jewish groups of limits

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Federal Election Commission's lawsuit against the Christian Coalition represents the kind of legal jam Jewish political advocacy groups have been careful to avoid.

The FEC is accusing the nation's largest group of religious conservatives of violating federal election law by promoting various Republican candidates in each national election since 1990.

The civil suit filed here in U.S. District Court charged that the Christian Coalition's non-partisan posture was bogus and that it illegally promoted the election of Republican candidates through voter guides and efforts to identify GOP voters and get them to the polls.

Some tax-exempt Jewish groups also distribute materials during election years to help inform voters about candidates and issues. But in accordance with federal law for tax-exempt organizations, Jewish officials say they are scrupulously non-partisan. "We are very careful not to do anything that might be construed as endorsing a candidate for political office," said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

Still, there has been a temptation, some in the Jewish community note, to speak out about specific candidates, particularly during a presidential election year.

"It's not always easy to resist that temptation, particularly when your ideological opponents appear to be doing so with impunity," said Marc Stern, director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

Now that the FEC appears to be cracking down on the Christian Coalition, Jewish officials say the lawsuit confirms what has always been clear: Tax-exempt groups are precluded from taking sides in electoral politics.

They are not, however, precluded from creating an informed electorate, and to that end, a number of Jewish groups engage in political education activities.

The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council carefully lays out the rules for such activity in a political education guide it publishes. The guide states that "any activity that has the hint of partisanship must be avoided." The NJCRAC guide, for example, encourages communities to hold educational forums with candidates, but stresses the necessity of inviting all declared contestants to participate.

'Reclaim America'

In another example of Jewish voter education efforts, the AJCongress distributes questionnaires in various regions of the country outlining candidates' positions. The issues are deliberately selected to reflect an array of concerns and the questionnaires offer no judgments.

The Christian Coalition's voter guides, in contrast, "don't really leave much doubt about how people should vote," Stern said.

This year, the Christian Coalition plans to distribute 45 million voter guides to 100,000 churches across the country — a project it has undertaken in past campaigns.

In its suit, the FEC cited a 1994 mailing packet the Christian Coalition sent out titled "Reclaim America," which included a scorecard rating congressional candidates.

The suit says: "The cover letter, signed by Pat Robertson, asserted that the enclosed scorecard would be an important tool for affecting the outcome of the upcoming elections. It stated: 'This scorecard will give America's Christian voters the facts they will need to distinguish between good and misguided congressmen.'"

The coalition has denied any wrongdoing. Ralph Reed, its executive director, said in a statement, "We are

absolutely and totally confident that we will be fully vindicated and the courts will affirm that people of faith have every right to be involved as citizens and voters." The Supreme Court may end up deciding that question.

For their part, Jewish groups are well-acquainted with the limitations on political involvement.

The AJCommittee and the Anti-Defamation League were both named in an FEC complaint during the early 1990s concerning a publication they distributed about the presidential candidacy of Lyndon LaRouche. The FEC said the publication indicated a position on LaRouche's candidacy, but it later dropped the complaint.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee was also involved in an FEC lawsuit in 1989. The suit charged that the pro-Israel lobby coordinated congressional campaign contributions made by various pro-Israel political action committees. The FEC later cleared AIPAC.

Mindful of the tax code's clear prohibition against partisan activity, Jewish groups have had to exercise great restraint in steering clear of partisan politicking.

Jewish officials, for example, have found themselves constrained from commenting publicly about the candidacy of David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan member who espouses anti-Semitic views. During election seasons, Jewish groups have been limited to speaking out against a candidate's anti-Semitism, but not about the qualifications of a specific candidate.

"There's a frustration level," said Karen Senter, NJCRAC's co-director for domestic concerns. "There have been situations where we have been concerned about political activity and have had discussions where we have had to remind people that, like it or not, we simply cannot do this, it's not legal."

For those in the Jewish community who have pointed to the Christian Coalition's partisan activities and asked why the Jewish community is not doing the same thing, Stern said the FEC lawsuit "is a pretty good answer to that question." □

Canadian court ruling lets Zundel reapply for citizenship

By Bill Gladstone

OTTAWA (JTA) — Ruling that a governmental security committee was biased against him, a federal court has given Toronto-based Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel a green light to reapply for Canadian citizenship.

The Aug. 1 ruling came in the wake of a finding by Canada's Security Intelligence Review Committee that Zundel posed a threat to security and should be denied citizenship.

Zundel, the author of the pamphlet "Did Six Million Really Die? Truth At Last Exposed," has been denied use of the mail for his activities and has twice been convicted of breaching Canada's hate laws. In each case, however, the decisions were overturned.

Last week's ruling elicited strong criticisms from Jewish groups. "Zundel has been dodging through our legal system and showing the Canadian courts that the hate law is toothless," B'nai Brith Canada said in a statement.

The organization called for an appeal of the federal court's decision, adding in the statement that it "finds it astonishing that Canada's security and intelligence services can be chastened for holding biases against ideologies and individuals who propagate hatred."

A German national with landed immigrant status, Zundel has said he intends to reapply for citizenship soon and that he will sue the federal government if it is not granted. If Zundel is denied citizenship, he could be deported to Germany, where he has been convicted under laws that bar Holocaust denial. □

Netanyahu-Hussein meeting focuses new attention on Syria

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and King Hussein of Jordan met face to face this week in Amman, but much of their attention turned to Damascus.

“We are prepared to engage in peace negotiations with Syria on all matters,” Netanyahu told reporters after meeting with Hussein in his first official visit to the Hashemite kingdom since his election as prime minister.

During a joint news conference Monday with Hussein, the prime minister said he had conveyed a proposal to the Syrians for restarting the talks, which were suspended March 4 when Syria failed to condemn a series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel.

Israel and Syria had been sounding each other out on the prospects for restarting negotiations even before Netanyahu visited the Jordanian capital.

Hussein served as intermediary for the two sides when he met Saturday with Syrian President Hafez Assad for five hours to discuss ways to renew the negotiations.

There were also reports that Netanyahu secretly met with a Syrian envoy last month in Jerusalem, but both Israel and Syria denied there had been any such contact.

Netanyahu said Monday that he was encouraged by the briefing he received from Hussein on the monarch’s weekend visit to Damascus.

The message Hussein conveyed from Damascus “shows that President Assad plans to continue seeking peace with the current Israeli government,” Netanyahu told Israel Radio. “This is a positive development,” Netanyahu also said.

Netanyahu said he is waiting for a response to a proposal Israel presented to Syria last Friday via American intermediaries.

‘Lebanon First’

He would not elaborate on details of the Israeli proposal, but there have been numerous reports that Israel was offering a “Lebanon First” arrangement, under which it would pull its troops out of southern Lebanon in exchange for the dismantling of Hezbollah units operating there.

In the absence of agreement on larger issues — particularly the long-standing Syrian demand that Israel withdraw from the Golan Heights as a precondition for achieving a full peace — Israeli officials have indicated that a Lebanon First agreement could be a good starting point for building mutual trust before tackling more difficult issues.

As he has often stated since becoming premier, Netanyahu said Monday that Israel had no territorial claims on southern Lebanon, where, he said, “there has been a steady escalation of violence.”

As if to underscore his point, there were reports that day that Hezbollah gunmen attacked an Israeli outpost in southern Lebanon, wounding two soldiers. The soldiers, who suffered minor injuries, were airlifted to Israel for treatment.

In his comments to reporters, Hussein voiced optimism about Netanyahu’s commitment to the peace process. He said Jordan was willing to continue serving as an intermediary and would “answer every call and extend every service to attain a comprehensive peace.”

The monarch also appeared to back the Israeli position that Jerusalem remain undivided.

“I’d like to say that it’s never occurred to us at any point in time — in fact since 1967 — that the city, in the context of peace, will be redivided,” Hussein said.

Netanyahu also used his remarks to express his commitment to continuing the Palestinian peace process, “including solving the problem of Hebron,” where Israeli troops are to be redeployed under the terms of the Interim Agreement.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told reporters Monday that no date had yet been set yet for the troop redeployment in the volatile West Bank town.

In what was apparently designed to build confidence on the Palestinian track, Netanyahu told reporters that Israel would allow an additional 5,000 Palestinian workers into Israel.

The move came as part of a recent easing of the closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the wake of the Hamas terror attacks earlier this year. It means that some 30,000 Palestinians would now be allowed to work in the Jewish state.

Joint economic issues were also on the agenda of the Israeli leader’s visit.

Jordanians have complained that they have yet to see tangible economic benefits from the peace treaty signed with Israel in October 1994.

Joining Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, in Amman was a delegation of leading Israeli industrialists and economists, who met with Crown Prince Hassan to discuss joint economic projects.

Netanyahu said the purpose of bringing the large delegation was to “breathe life into the peace accord” with Jordan. □

Families of 3 missing Israelis deny rumors Syria has bodies

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The families of three Israeli soldiers who have been missing for 14 years have said they have not received any new information about their loved ones.

The families met last week with the head of the Israel Defense Force manpower division after Palestinian sources claimed that the soldiers — Zechariah Baumel, Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz — were buried in a cemetery in Syria.

The three soldiers were declared missing after they were taken prisoner during the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee.

Their families have since launched an international effort to obtain information regarding their whereabouts.

Israel Radio last week quoted a senior Palestinian security source as saying that Palestinian security officials had passed information on to Israel one year ago that the three were buried in Syria.

The source said Israel had asked the United States to intervene on its behalf with Syria for the return of the bodies, but that the contacts were disrupted by Operation Grapes of Wrath, Israel’s air and artillery bombardment in April of Hezbollah targets in Lebanon.

In light of the reports, the families of the soldiers were summoned to meet Aug. 1 with the IDF manpower head, Maj. Gen. Gideon Sheffer, at the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv.

But they emerged from the meeting saying that no new information had been disclosed or confirmed.

Zechariah Baumel’s father, Yona, said he believed that the purpose of the meeting was to dispel the media rumors.

“We were wondering why we were called from Jerusalem in a big hurry to come down here,” Baumel said. “He told us to beware of rumors, that much he did.”

His wife, Miriam, said the family would continue efforts to obtain information about their son’s fate. □