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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton meets Barak

President Clinton held a surprise meeting for more than 30 minutes last Friday at the White House with Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak. They discussed the Iraqi crisis and its implications for the Middle East peace process.

The meeting was arranged by the U.S. national security adviser, Sandy Berger, who met separately with Barak.

U.N., Iraqis reach agreement

U.N. and Iraqi officials said U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had reached an agreement regarding inspections of suspected weapons sites.

American officials cautioned that they would accept no agreement that did not offer weapons inspectors unfettered access to the sites.

JCPA plenum opens in Florida

More than 300 delegates to the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs began their four-day conference in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., with speeches from Israeli Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein and opposition leader Ehud Barak. Some 250 college students also attended the conference, which sets forth some of the public policy positions of the organized Jewish community. [Page 1]

Le Pen goes on trial

A French state prosecutor asked a court to sentence extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen to three months in prison and ban him from public office for two years on charges he assaulted a female politician during a legislative campaign last year.

The 69-year-old Le Pen, who has made numerous anti-Semitic statements in the past, went on trial last week for allegedly grabbing a socialist candidate by the collar of her blouse and shaking her violently while campaigning last May for his daughter, Caroline. [Page 3]

Israel mulls antidote distribution

Israeli health officials opposed the distribution of antidotes to the public to counter a possible biological weapons attack by Iraq.

Health Minister Yehoshua Matza said distributing the antidotes now would only sow panic.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Survey of U.S. Jews intensifies debate over just where they stand

By Matthew Dorf

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. (JTA) — The debate over exactly where American Jews stand when it comes to the Middle East peace process heated up this week with the release of a survey whose respondents were sharply critical of the current Israeli government.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization of local community relations councils and national agencies, joined the battle at its annual plenum here this week, issuing its first-ever study of affiliated Jews.

According to preliminary results and analysis released by JCPA — the full survey is not yet available — the survey reaffirms long-held positions in the organized Jewish community, ranging from opposition to school vouchers to general support for the State of Israel.

The sample of 6,800 affiliated Jews in 14 communities across the country comes amid a continuing battle between liberal and conservative Jewish institutions that have conducted extensive polling of American Jews in recent months in an effort to influence the Clinton administration's policies on the Middle East peace process.

Unlike other polls of Jewish opinion, the latest survey is not a scientific sampling, said JCPA officials.

The questionnaires were sent by mail to randomly selected grass-roots federation donors and/or Jewish newspaper subscribers.

In a separate survey, the same questions were put to a sample of board members of local community relations councils in an effort to determine whether they are in step with the grass roots on whose behalf they claim to speak.

The survey was a "reality check" intended as a tool for local and national Jewish officials, according to Lawrence Rubin, executive vice chairman of JCPA, formerly known as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

In most cases, the organizational leaders agreed with the community at large.

"Our fingers are, in fact, on the pulse of the community," Rubin said.

In one break, however, the survey showed strong support among grass-roots Jews for the 1996 welfare reform law.

The law significantly reduced access to food stamps, Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income for poor people as well as legal immigrants.

That law was vigorously opposed by most JCPA member agencies.

Opinion polls always generate some controversy, with many believing that the way a survey is carried out or the way the questions are phrased can predetermine the outcome.

But the debate intensified in the Jewish community after the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum presented its poll directly to President Clinton at a White House dinner last year.

Using Clinton's own pollster, Penn and Schoen, that survey found that 84 percent of American Jews believe the administration should pressure both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to act more constructively and be more forthcoming in peace negotiations.

Those results prompted the more hawkish Middle East Quarterly to commission its own poll.

In its poll, the Middle East Quarterly found that only 24 percent of American Jews

MIDEAST FOCUS

Court hears Sheinbein case

A Jerusalem court convened to hear U.S. officials press their extradition request for a Maryland teenager charged with murder.

Lawyers for Samuel Sheinbein are challenging the request, citing an Israeli law that a citizen of the Jewish state who commits a crime abroad cannot be extradited. Israel's attorney general stated last year that the citizenship law does not apply to Sheinbein.

Arabs continue demonstrations

Palestinians held pro-Iraq demonstrations in several West Bank towns over the weekend in defiance of a Palestinian Authority ban on public shows of support for Iraq. In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, marchers shouted, "Saddam, our dear one, send your missiles to Tel Aviv."

Officer hurt in West Bank

An Israeli officer was lightly hurt when a large rock was thrown at his car near the West Bank town of Ramallah. The rock smashed the car's roof and windshield, according to a witness, who added that it took some time before the officer could be extracted from the crumpled vehicle with special hydraulic equipment.

Israeli jets strike in Lebanon

Israeli air force jets struck suspected Hezbollah targets in the eastern sector of the southern Lebanon security zone. The air assault came after Hezbollah gunmen attacked an Israeli position in the zone.

Klingberg visits home

Convicted spy Marcus Klingberg was allowed out of his jail in Israel for a 36-hour visit home for the first time in 15 years. Klingberg, who was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union, has been jailed since 1983. The 80-year-old prisoner's repeated requests for an early release due to health reasons have been rejected.

said Clinton should pressure Netanyahu to move faster on trading land for peace than he wants to.

The JCPA survey appears to break the tie on Middle East issues.

Some 70 percent of the grass-roots respondents support pressure on both Netanyahu and Arafat — but it is unlikely to silence the debate.

Among the other findings related to Israel:

- The grass-roots respondents split 52 percent to 47 percent over whether American Jews should "support the policies of the duly elected government of Israel" regardless of their individual views on the peace negotiations.

- The respondents also criticized Netanyahu's treatment of Palestinians.

Some 60 percent of those polled said the Israeli premier has unnecessarily provoked them.

Among CRC leaders surveyed, criticism of the prime minister in this regard jumped to 68 percent.

- On the question of Jewish settlements, 62 percent of the grass roots and 64 percent of the leaders agreed with the statement that "Israel should freeze further settlements" on the West Bank.

- Regarding a Palestinian state, 79 percent among both the grass roots and the leadership said the Palestinians have a right to an independent state that doesn't threaten the Jewish state.

At the same time, 56 percent of those who said the Palestinians had that right said such a state would be a threat to Israel.

- On matters relating to religious pluralism, 80 percent of the grass roots said men and women should be allowed to pray together in the vicinity of the Western Wall and 89 percent said Israel should recognize conversions performed in Israel by Reform and Conservative rabbis.

Among the Orthodox Jews surveyed, 24 percent said men and women should be allowed to pray together.

Some 26 percent of these respondents said Reform and Conservative conversions should be recognized.

Five percent of those surveyed were Orthodox.

On U.S. domestic issues, the survey found:

- 61 percent of grass-roots Jews said the welfare reform law is a "good thing," compared with 49 percent of CRC leaders;

- On the voucher issue, the grass-roots individuals opposed school vouchers by a margin of 3-to-1; the leadership surveyed opposed vouchers 5-to-1.

JCPA plans to use the survey to bolster its continuing opposition to school vouchers as the national debate over giving tuition or tax credits to parochial school students intensifies.

- Among those grass-roots respondents who send their children to Jewish day schools — 14 percent of the people surveyed — 54 percent favor vouchers;

Among the Orthodox Jews surveyed, 74 percent approve of vouchers.

- On the issue of affirmative action, the sample showed some disagreement between organizational leaders and grass-roots activists.

While both groups strongly oppose the use of quotas in hiring and college admissions, 47 percent of the grass-roots respondents — compared with 68 percent of leaders — approve of gender, race or ethnicity as one criterion in selecting qualified individuals.

JCPA was scheduled to launch a yearlong review of the issue during its conference here.

The federation communities that participated in the survey were: Atlanta; Bergen County, N.J.; Cleveland; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas; Detroit; East Bay, Calif.; Houston; Indianapolis; Los Angeles; Milwaukee; Philadelphia; San Francisco and Seattle.

New York, the largest Jewish population center in the United States, elected not to participate.

Lawrence Sternberg, director of the Perlmutter Institute for Jewish Advocacy at Brandeis University, ran the survey.

A breakdown of individual community results of the survey will not be available for several weeks, Sternberg said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Demjanjuk regains citizenship

A U.S. federal judge restored the American citizenship of John Demjanjuk, the retired auto worker cleared of charges that he was a notorious death camp guard known as Ivan the Terrible.

Demjanjuk, 77, was stripped of his citizenship in 1981 and extradited to Israel in 1986. He was convicted there of crimes against humanity in 1988 and sentenced to death.

His conviction was overturned on appeal, and the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that Demjanjuk was not Ivan the Terrible and freed him after seven years in prison.

Swiss reject Jewish claim

Switzerland rejected the compensation claim of a World War II Jewish refugee whose parents were murdered in Auschwitz after Swiss authorities deported them in 1942.

Charles Sonabend, a 67-year-old resident of London who demanded \$68,000 in damages, intends to appeal the decision to Switzerland's supreme court.

State may act against Generali

California's insurance commissioner threatened severe action against a major Italian insurance firm after company officials failed to appear at a hearing about benefits that may be owed to Holocaust survivors.

Chuck Quackenbush said Assicurazioni Generali's failure to appear at the hearing showed contempt for the regulatory process, adding that he might ask a state court to force company officials to appear or block the company from doing business in the state. Generali filed a motion last week to block Quackenbush's subpoenas, but a judge denied its legal challenge.

U.S. accuses Swiss insurers

U.S. insurance officials are accusing Swiss insurance companies of blocking access to their archives to cover up their behavior during World War II. The officials are investigating claims by the heirs of Holocaust victims that European insurance firms blocked payments to the families of death camp victims.

The row intensified after Swiss insurers argued that domestic laws barred them from opening up their books regarding the policies of Holocaust victims.

It's never too late

A Philadelphia man became a bar mitzvah at the age of 93, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer. Harvey Penson was not religious until his wife of 63 years died recently, the newspaper quoted his daughter as saying. Penson, who turned to Jewish studies to cope with his loss, said he became a bar mitzvah "because I love all this Jewish stuff."

Prosecutor asks court to ban anti-Semitic French politician

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A state prosecutor is seeking to lock up France's most-well-known anti-Semite.

The prosecutor has asked a French court to sentence Jean-Marie Le Pen to three months in prison and ban him from public office for two years on charges he assaulted a female politician during a legislative campaign last year.

The 69-year-old head of the xenophobic National Front was on trial last week for allegedly grabbing Socialist candidate Annette Peulvast by the collar of her blouse and shaking her violently while campaigning for his daughter, Caroline, two days before the final round of voting on June 1. He is also accused of kicking two demonstrators hostile to his party and calling another "faggot."

Prosecutor Jean-Claude Dumaret also asked the court to strip Le Pen of his voting and civil rights for at least two years and fine him \$3,300.

If the court agrees with the prosecutor's request, it would be the most severe blow to date for Le Pen, who has already been fined for saying that Nazi gas chambers were a "detail" in the history of World War II.

But it would not prevent him from running in regional elections next month because the sentence could not be applied until his appeals were exhausted. Le Pen has said he would appeal, which could take up to a few years.

Le Pen decried the prosecutor's request as a "plot" by France's government.

"With such methods, dictators wouldn't need gulags or concentration camps because they could get rid of political opponents behind a facade of pseudo-legality," Le Pen said in a statement. He has, in turn, taken legal action against several anti-National Front demonstrators on charges they infringed upon his right to campaign.

A videotape shot by an amateur shows Le Pen brawling with Peulvast, who was town mayor. Peulvast, who went on to beat Caroline Le Pen for the National Assembly seat, was slightly hurt in the incident. She is asking for \$16,500 in damages.

Le Pen led several thousand supporters Saturday in a rally in the Paris suburb of Versailles, the site of his trial, lambasting the government with the slogan, "Communists, assassins; socialists, swindlers!" □

Latvian president, legislators battle over Holocaust remark

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The battle between Latvia's president and the country's Parliament over participation in the Holocaust is showing no signs of slowing down.

On the eve of a scheduled visit to Israel this week, Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis has sent a letter to the Baltic nation's Parliament urging lawmakers to admit that Latvians participated in the Holocaust.

"The historical truth is that there were Latvians who participated in the Holocaust, and there were Latvians who helped Jews and hid them in their houses," Ulmanis said in his letter. The letter came a day after the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel branch told a leading Latvian daily newspaper that Latvian society is reluctant to admit that "numerous Latvians" collaborated with the Nazis.

Ulmanis recently met with Latvians who hid Jews during the Nazi occupation.

Last month, the Latvian Parliament called on Ulmanis to appear before them and explain his remarks about Latvian participation in the Holocaust, which he made during a trip to the United States in early January.

The legislators made the request after receiving a copy of Ulmanis' speech to the Anti-Defamation League in which he apologized for Latvian participation in the genocide of Jews.

Ulmanis made his remarks while accepting the Distinguished Statesman Award from the ADL. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

**Battling hate on the Internet:
Block it or educate against it***By Faygie Levy*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The war against hate has a new battlefield — the Internet.

The Internet is popular among hate groups because they find it easier to “market their products to millions of homes in a market that’s dominated and best used by young people,” according to Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The number of Web sites promoting hate has doubled in the last year, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The problem is so disturbing that the United Nations took up the issue at a recent conference in Geneva. And President Clinton recently announced plans to create a “family-friendly Internet,” but how to accomplish that goal is up for debate.

Virtually no one in the United States is advocating for laws to restrict hate material on the Internet because of free-speech concerns — the answer to combating hate on the Internet, say experts, lies in educating against it or in using technology that blocks access to certain Web sites.

The ADL and a business called The Learning Company are currently developing software that would block out hate sites, said Mark Edelman, ADL’s director of marketing and communications.

The software should be available in the next month, he said.

But while filtering software appears to be a viable solution at first glance, some doubt whether it would be effective.

The two main types of filtering software now available either impede access to certain Web sites based on keywords in the site or block sites based on URLs — Web site addresses.

The Learning Company, makers of Cyber Patrol filtering software, currently creates a list of possibly offensive sites based on keywords. An employee then looks at each site to see if it meets the company’s criteria. If it does, the site is blocked, said Susan Getgood, The Learning Company’s director of marketing.

Among the criteria are “pictures or text advocating prejudice or discrimination” and those “advocating extremely aggressive and combative behaviors, or unlawful political measures,” according to a company list.

Some sites, such as those sponsored by the Aryan Nation, are easy to identify. Others, like Holocaust-denier sites, are a more “complicated question” because blocking the denier also blocks sites that refute the denier, Getgood said.

For example, both the ADL and Wiesenthal Center Web sites could be blocked because of keywords found on hate sites.

A new version of the filtering software being developed by the ADL and The Learning Company aims to overcome that problem.

Software designed to block URLs have been ineffective because of mirror sites. A mirror site, which copies information from the first URL, can be created to bypass the filter’s block.

The effectiveness of mirror sites has led to frustration in countries, such as Germany, that have strict laws against hate speech on the Internet. In some of those countries, neo-Nazi sites can be removed from domestic Internet providers. However, officials have no control over mirror sites created in other countries and accessed by people in their country. Because Americans are loath to restrict hate speech, mirror sites are usually created in the

United States. The Internet should “get the same protection as any other type of communication,” said Kenneth Stern, a specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism for the American Jewish Committee.

The U.S. Supreme Court agrees. Last June, it struck down the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which sought to regulate use of the Internet. The court ruled that by denying minors access to harmful speech, the law “suppresses a large amount of speech that adults have a constitutional right to receive” and discuss.

Efforts are now under way to restrict access to Web sites along lines similar to the ratings placed on television programs.

Under a plan endorsed by several Internet search engines, including Yahoo! and Excite, Internet sites will be required to label the content of their site when applying for a spot in the search engines’ list of sites.

Clinton has expressed support for such a labeling plan.

And IBM recently announced a grant to create a non-profit organization to develop a content labeling system for the Internet.

But labeling systems, while helping to guide a computer user, do not block access to hate material. Some say that the best solution to countering the content of hate sites is to educate against them.

“Talk about some of the bad things on the Web” with children, and “what you don’t want them looking at,” said Marc Klein, publisher of the Jewish Community site on America Online, a leading Internet provider, adding that it is no different then telling your kids you don’t want them doing drugs.

Similar sentiments were echoed during the U.N. conference in Geneva in November, when one participant urged parents to show their kids the various sites to teach them what is on the Internet.

Some organizations are even developing anti-racist sites.

Bell Atlantic, a regional telephone company, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a U.S. civil rights coalition, are creating a Web site that “is an antidote to cyberhate,” said Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference.

The site — www.civilrights.org — will provide information on hate crimes across the country, law-enforcement strategies and material to teach youngsters about tolerance.

“This Web site will respond to hate with information and competing ideas without seeking to restrict Internet speech,” Henderson said.

That approach is similar to one advanced in a 1992 U.S. Department of Commerce report on telecommunications-based hate speech, which concluded that the best response to hate speech “is more speech to educate the public and promote greater tolerance.”

But despite all the efforts to counter hate on the Internet, hate groups continue to use the technology to promote their ideology.

There are more than 600 hate Web sites, according to the Wiesenthal Center, and with an estimated 50 million computer users, worldwide hate groups have discovered the fastest way to reach the masses.

The Internet is being used by anti-Semites “to promote their ideas in the virtual equivalent of Times Square,” said Cooper, referring to an area of New York City seen by millions each day.

But not everyone worries about hate groups operating online.

With just 11 percent of Americans online, hate groups are “almost talking to themselves,” said the Jewish Community’s Klein, the editor of the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California. Stern, of the AJCommittee, acknowledged there is no way to estimate how many people are influenced by the sites, but groups wouldn’t be using them if there “wasn’t some value to it.” □