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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel seeks focus on security

Israeli officials said they want to focus solely on security issues during current sessions of the Middle East peace summit being held near Washington. The officials changed their stance after at least 64 Israelis were wounded when a Palestinian hurled two grenades into Beersheba's central bus station.

Meanwhile, Jordan's King Hussein may join the summit, according to a U.S. State Department official. The king has been responding well to cancer treatment and is planning to travel to his Maryland home to rest, the official added. [Page 3]

Premier meets settler leaders

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ignored American objections and slipped away from the secluded site of the Middle East summit to meet with settler leaders. The settlers urged the premier not to make any concessions to the Palestinians.

Netanyahu had invited them to join him at the Wye Plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore for Shabbat, but American officials refused to admit them to the summit site.

Farrakhan blames conspiracy

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan suggested that the sex scandal plaguing President Clinton was introduced as part of a Zionist conspiracy to reduce U.S. pressure on Israel.

In an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," Farrakhan, echoing criticism heard earlier in parts of the Muslim world, also insisted he does not hate Jews, but is only "hateful of their inordinate control over black politicians, black intellectuals, black organizations, and I will fight to destroy that kind of control as long as God gives me health and strength."

Syria lashes out at Israel

A Syrian official said Israel would be the only country to benefit from a confrontation between Syria and Turkey.

Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas' comment came as Damascus and Ankara reportedly prepared to hold talks for the first time since a crisis flared up earlier this month over Syria's support for Kurdish nationalists in Turkey.

Israel and Turkey have strengthened their military ties during the last year.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Pope John Paul II marks 20 years of revolution in interfaith relations

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Pope John Paul II has marked the 20th anniversary of his election as pope.

The two decades of his papacy have revolutionized relations between Roman Catholics and Jews. With milestones such as the first papal visit to a synagogue and the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Holy See, John Paul has instituted an official Catholic opening to Jews, their sensitivities and their causes unprecedented in 2,000 years of church history.

"John Paul has placed those relationships squarely in the mainstream of Catholic teaching, preaching, liturgy — indeed, in all forms of church life," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious relations for the American Jewish Committee.

The process has not been without serious ups and downs, particularly regarding the Vatican's handling of some issues stemming from the Catholic Church's actions — or inaction — during the Holocaust.

"Whenever we get to the core issues around the Shoah, things get much more complicated," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The beatification earlier this month of Croatia's wartime Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, accused by critics of collaborating with the fascists, is one example. Beatification, the last step before sainthood, appeared hardly appropriate for Stepinac, who has been reviled by some as a collaborator with the Nazi puppet regime that ruled Croatia during the war.

Beatifying Stepinac, said Cooper, "on whose watch the murder of innocent Serbs, Jews and Gypsies took place, is an outrage."

A separate ceremony earlier this month, in which sainthood was conferred on Edith Stein — a Carmelite nun, killed at Auschwitz, who was born a Jew and converted to Catholicism — also strained some Jewish sensibilities.

Another example is a controversial Vatican document on the Shoah released in March. While the document expressed repentance for individual Catholic failings during the Shoah, it absolved the church itself from any responsibility and strongly defended wartime Pope Pius XII against the decades-old criticism of his silence in the face of the Holocaust.

"Clearly John Paul has every intention of putting Pius XII on the fast track to 'sainthood,' " a move that "will further strain the rapprochement with the Jewish world," said Cooper.

The Jewish world was also outraged when John Paul paid honor to former Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, despite evidence that Waldheim had lied about his Nazi past.

Further straining Jewish-Catholic relations was a bitter conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s over the establishment of a Carmelite convent in a building adjacent to the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

And although the Vatican established full diplomatic relations with Israel in late 1993, the status of Jerusalem, which the Vatican wants to see put under international mandate, also creates problems.

Nonetheless, the strides in improving Jewish-Catholic relations under John Paul's papacy have been enormous. Official sanction of full-scale Catholic-Jewish dialogue only dates back to 1965, when the Second Vatican Council issued "Nostra Aetate" —

MIDEAST FOCUS

Committee passes election bill

An Israeli Knesset committee approved a bill that would abolish the direct election of the prime minister and return to the electoral system that was in effect prior to Israel's 1996 elections.

The bill now goes to the full Knesset for a first vote.

Shooting near Hebron?

Three Palestinians said they were wounded when Israeli security forces fired at them at a checkpoint near Hebron.

But the army said it was not involved and was investigating the possibility that Palestinian gunmen had opened fire because the victims' car bore Israeli license plates.

Settler extremism feared

Extremism among Jewish settlers is on the rise and could lead to an act of terror, according to Israeli army intelligence.

The classified report, which aired on Israel Television, focused on tensions within Hebron's settler population.

Lawmakers may carry guns

The Israeli Knesset will supply pistols to any lawmakers who want them.

The speaker of the Knesset, Dan Tichon, said he made the decision after threats were made on the lives of several lawmakers.

Exhibit honors survivors

Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial opened an exhibit detailing the experiences of Holocaust survivors who fought in Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

The exhibit includes film footage, photographs, diaries, sketches and other artifacts dating from the period.



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or "In Our Times" — a declaration that repudiated the concept of Jewish guilt for Jesus' death and called for mutual respect and dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

From the beginning of his papacy, John Paul made the bettering of relations with the Jewish world — and the condemnation of anti-Semitism — cornerstones of his policy. One reason was that he himself lived through the horrors of the Nazi occupation of his native Poland and saw firsthand the effects of the Holocaust and the effects of postwar Communist anti-Semitism.

John Paul has spoken out strongly against anti-Semitism on numerous occasions, and he has taken a number of other significant, highly publicized, actions to demonstrate his regard for the Jewish world.

In 1979, he paid homage at Auschwitz to the victims of Nazism, on his first trip back to Poland after his election to the papacy.

In 1987, he visited the main synagogue in Rome, where he embraced Rome's chief rabbi and referred to Jews as Christianity's "older brothers."

Throughout his papacy he has held numerous meetings with Jewish communities in various countries and has met with numerous Jewish delegations at the Vatican.

He has also sponsored events such as a concert at the Vatican in 1994 to commemorate the Holocaust and a symposium at the Vatican in 1997 to discuss Christian roots of anti-Semitism.

Despite the progress, though, it remains clear that the implementation of the new, official church teachings on Jewish issues remains a key challenge.

The new teachings are not always heeded, transmitted or acknowledged — and are sometimes even rejected.

Polish Roman Catholic extremists who claim to be "defending the cross," for example, have defied church leaders in erecting hundreds of crosses outside the walls of Auschwitz since July, and have injected a heavy dose of anti-Semitism into their public statements.

Maintaining the momentum established by John Paul will be a key priority in Catholic-Jewish relations as the church heads into its third millennium.

Future popes may not have John Paul's commitment to bettering Jewish relations at the forefront of Vatican policy. These issues may become marginalized, but it is unlikely that the process of expanding Catholic-Jewish dialogue will be reversed.

"Because of the pope's personal background and because of the length of his reign," said Rudin, "history will record that John Paul II's achievements are epoch-making; achievements that permanently changed the way Catholics and Jews relate to one another. That is his greatest gift to future generations." □

Doctor denies he committed atrocities

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A former Nazi doctor who admitted to working at Auschwitz has denied that he took part in atrocities.

Prosecutors in Munich began investigating Hans Muench after he was quoted in a recent interview in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* as saying he was not bothered when he worked at Auschwitz and that gassing Jews spared them from further suffering.

"I could conduct experiments on people that otherwise are only possible with rabbits. That was an important contribution to science," Muench said.

He also said that after two or three days, it was easy to adjust to life at the death camp.

Prosecutors in Frankfurt have also reopened multiple investigations into the wartime actions of Muench, who is alleged to have infected prisoners with malaria. Previous investigations were dropped due to lack of evidence. But the Prosecutor's Office says new evidence has surfaced from files that were found in the archives of the Stasi, the former East German security service.

"He outed himself," said Willi Dressen, the director of the central office for the investigation of Nazi crimes in Ludwisburg, Germany. Dressen said Muench was the only one of 40 defendants cleared of charges during a trial in Krakow, Poland, in 1947.

Muench, who lives in a village in Bavaria, claimed in the magazine interview that he saved many people by killing a few. □

JEWISH WORLD

Candidates battle for Jewish vote

The two candidates for the open Senate seat in New York traded barbs as their battle for the Jewish vote escalated. The incumbent Republican, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, criticized Democratic Rep. Charles Schumer's voting record on Holocaust issues and touted his own role in convincing Swiss banks to settle Holocaust-era claims. Schumer responded by criticizing D'Amato for trivializing the Holocaust by using it for political purposes.

German firm seeks negotiations

The chief executive of a German company sued last week by slave laborers said he wants to hold discussions with Jewish groups on the issue.

The chief executive officer of Phillipp Holzmann also said his company "acknowledges its moral responsibility" in using forced labor.

Young Jewish adults surveyed

Younger American Jewish adults are as attached to Judaism as their older counterparts, according to a new survey.

But they are less attached to the notion of Jewish ethnic identity as measured by such factors as attachment to Israel, according to the study, which was conducted for the Jewish Community Centers Association's Research Center. The survey polled 1,005 Jewish adults between the ages of 25 and 65.

Meanwhile, a separate survey showed that some 95 percent of former members of the Young Judaea Zionist youth group are married to other Jews. They were more than twice as likely as Jews in the general population to light Shabbat candles, to keep kosher and to attend services monthly; and they were nearly twice as likely to be synagogue members, according to the survey of 603 alumni of the Hadassah-sponsored group.

Far-right candidate loses

One of the leaders of France's far-right party lost a regional election to a politician representing the Green Party. The defeat of Jean-Marie Le Chevallier, the mayor of the port city of Toulon, comes three weeks after another National Front candidate, Le Chevallier's wife, Cendrine, lost a parliamentary election.

Kosher meals prompt release

A Virginia jail recently released an Orthodox Jewish man because kosher meals cost an additional \$70 a day. Neil Lederman, who was sentenced to 11 months for writing a bad check, was released after serving three weeks and placed on home detention.

Outraged prosecutors asked police to investigate whether Lederman's meal requests were valid.

Attack in southern Israel highlights security concerns

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A grenade attack in the Negev town of Beersheba has highlighted the leading stumbling block at the Middle East peace summit taking place thousands of miles away.

At least 64 Israelis were wounded when a Palestinian hurled two hand grenades during Monday's morning rush hour into the Beersheba bus station. Two people were reported in serious condition, but most suffered only minor wounds or were treated for shock. Bystanders pounced on the assailant, who was arrested.

Within hours of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a statement from the Wye Plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the site of the summit, that he had "no intention of stopping the talks in view of the fact that the purpose is to achieve an agreement that will ensure the security of Israel."

But hours later, after Netanyahu conferred with his Inner Security Cabinet, he canceled planned discussions about opening a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip, saying in a second statement that "there is a need to focus on security and terror."

One Palestinian official at the summit called the Israeli stance "cheap blackmail." Security issues have been the main sticking point from the Israeli standpoint in the talks, which began last week and have been attended several times by President Clinton.

Palestinian officials attending the Wye talks condemned the attack, adding that they were already cracking down on terror. Some officials said the attack would give Israeli hard-liners an excuse to scuttle the peace talks.

Because of the attack, American officials are shifting their goals from obtaining a comprehensive deal to getting the two sides to agree to a partial settlement.

Clinton, who was joined by Vice President Al Gore in a full-court press to clinch a deal, returned to Wye on Monday after talks with Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon that went late the night before. On Monday, Clinton planned separate meetings with Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat before bringing the two together over dinner.

In the wake of Monday's attack, the United States released a joint Israeli-Palestinian statement saying the two sides "pledge to cooperate against the threat of terrorism and recognize that fighting terror is a vital interest for both sides."

"At the same time," the statement added, "we agree not to give in to the efforts of extremists to destroy the hope for peace and security for both our peoples."

Meanwhile, Jordan's King Hussein may join the summit, according to a U.S. State Department official. The king has been responding well to cancer treatment and is planning to travel to his Maryland home to rest, added the official.

The U.S. State Department issued a statement denying an Israeli report that the cancer afflicting Hussein is terminal.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin came close to doing so, saying that the attack was "part of our continued resistance to the occupation of our land."

The attack came after Hamas leaders had issued warnings that they would retaliate for the killings last month of two leaders of its military wing by Israeli security forces.

Israeli officials, who during the past several weeks thwarted what they said were planned Hamas terrorist bombings, recently lifted a closure that had been imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Rosh Hashanah until the end of Sukkot.

The assailant, who came from the Hebron area, was carrying grenades in a bag, according to witnesses.

Police said he wanted to kill soldiers, who were among the injured.

President Ezer Weizman visited the wounded at Beersheba's Soroka Hospital and later told reporters that he believes the Wye summit should not be halted.

Communications Minister Limor Livnat gave her qualified agreement.

"Perhaps one should not have gone to [the summit] in the first place," she said. "But once there, Premier Netanyahu will make sure that Israel's security needs will be taken into account." □

ELECTIONS '98**Christian Coalition potent despite legislative setbacks**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Pat Robertson still has a dream for America.

It includes a Bible in every classroom, a ban on abortion, an end to gay rights and a hand-picked presidential candidate winning the White House, giving religious conservatives footholds at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Since rising to prominence in the last decade, Robertson's Christian Coalition has achieved a great deal of success in furthering that vision. In 1994, the group was instrumental in helping sweep the first Republican majority to power in both houses of Congress in 40 years, and religious conservatives began to see their agenda advanced by Republican leaders who made clear their debt of gratitude.

But most political observers believe the influence of the conservative Christian lobby has waned in recent years, particularly following Ralph Reed's departure as the group's executive director. The legislative successes have been fewer, while some lawmakers have publicly shied away from the group's agenda.

Still, few doubt the group's continued potency, both as a political and electoral force.

With the November mid-term election only weeks away, the group's ideological opponents, including most mainstream Jewish groups, will be watching to see how voters respond to candidates with backing from the Christian Coalition during an election year in which religious conservatives have predicted large gains.

The Senate races in Washington state between Democratic Sen. Patty Murray and Republican Rep. Linda Smith, and in South Carolina between Democratic Sen. Ernest Hollings and Republican Rep. Bob Inglis, are among those on the watch list. Both Smith and Inglis have the support of the coalition.

The coalition's critics hope the group's interests fare as poorly at the polls as they say its agenda did in the 105th Congress, which is set to adjourn this month.

Indeed, the current Congress has handed the Christian Coalition few major legislative victories. Two of the group's priority issues — a constitutional amendment that would have paved the way for school prayer and government funding of religious institutions, and an override of President Clinton's veto of the so-called partial-birth abortion ban — both went down in defeat. A third priority issue, passage of legislation aimed at fighting religious persecution abroad, finally stands a good chance of passing after a series of setbacks.

"Their inability to achieve victories on their priority issues in the 105th Congress, a Congress that should be highly favorable to their concerns, suggests they're not very effective as an advocacy group," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

The Christian Coalition, for its part, emphasizes that it is involved in a long-term fight to promote its agenda and has claimed victory in winning a majority of votes on issues like the school prayer amendment and the partial-birth abortion override attempt, both of which required a two-thirds vote in order to pass.

It also touts passage of a \$500 per child tax credit, which

became law, as well as passage of a school voucher program for Washington, D.C., and a bill creating tax-favored education savings accounts, both of which President Clinton vetoed.

"Our Number 1 obstacle has been at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, not at Capitol Hill," a spokeswoman for the coalition said.

Turning their attention to the upcoming election at the group's annual conference in Washington last month, leaders of the Christian Coalition said they will work harder than ever to energize their members to get out and vote on Nov. 3. The organization intends, as it has in years past, to distribute 45 million voter guides, most of them in churches on the Sunday before the election. The guide includes a score card rating congressional candidates.

At the same time, Robertson is seeking to galvanize the rank and file to turn their outrage at Clinton into an all-out effort to elect what he called "family values" candidates in November.

"I think they smell blood with the Clinton controversies and hope that they will be able to claim credit for significant Republican gains, and then argue that it was because of their social agenda," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

While Jewish activists have been at the forefront in trying to counter the Christian Coalition's agenda, there are some in the Jewish community, particularly among the Orthodox, who believe the effort is misguided.

"The majority of American Jewish organizations have a vested interest in misleading the Jewish community with respect to this group (in order to) to promote a liberal agenda that has replaced Judaism," said Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin, president of Toward Tradition, who proudly proclaims himself the "rabbi" of the Christian Coalition faithful.

Matt Brooks, executive director of the pro-Republican National Jewish Coalition, agreed, saying that "demagoguing and scare tactics" used by some in the Jewish community have "not only backfired but undermined and jeopardized what should be an important working relationship between the Jewish community and evangelical Christians."

He added that there is a misperception in the Jewish community that the Christian Coalition is a "monolithic force that wields this enormous power over Republicans."

While most attention on the Christian Coalition tends to focus on its activities on the national level, not to be overlooked are its political successes beyond the Washington Beltway.

The organization has been active in getting religious conservatives elected at the state and local level, including hundreds of school boards across the country. That, perhaps more than anything else, foretells a long-term and influential presence on the American political landscape.

Speaking at last month's Christian Coalition conference here, Robertson declared that reports of his organization's demise were greatly exaggerated, saying, "The coalition is here for the long haul and we're going to see victory."

Jewish activists, for their part, acknowledge that they, too, must be ready to fight a long-term ideological battle and must not become complacent.

"One always likes to take some comfort in any sort of signs of weakness in one's adversaries, but the safest strategy is to just carry on assuming that they're going to put up a good fight, and we have put up a good fight too," said Sammie Moshenberg, Washington director of the National Council of Jewish Women. □