



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### NEWS ANALYSIS

## Bolstered by Florida victory, voucher advocates set new goals

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Bolstered by a victory in Florida, advocates for school vouchers are hoping for similar successes around the country.

Florida will have the first statewide, taxpayer-supported voucher system when Gov. Jeb Bush, who made the tuition credits a key part of his campaign, signs a bill passed last week by the Florida legislature.

The program, which offers tax dollars to attend private and religious schools to students in failing public schools, sets a precedent that has voucher proponents claiming victory and opponents preparing legal challenges. The voucher legislation was passed even as a measure that would have allowed prayer at school gatherings failed to come up on the last day of Florida's legislative session.

The voucher move is seen as a significant step in the national debate regarding the use of school vouchers.

"If a state as significant as Florida makes use of" vouchers, the issue becomes central "to our political conversation," said Marshall Breger, vice chairman of the Jewish Policy Center, a conservative think-tank affiliated with the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group.

"If Florida works, it will increase the political pressure" on other states to seek voucher programs and on cities to expand programs where vouchers already exist, said Breger, a law professor at Catholic University in Washington who has been an outspoken proponent of vouchers.

The question of vouchers has divided the Jewish community along religious and political fault lines. Some activists see vouchers as a means to increase Jewish identity by enabling more parents to afford to send their children to Jewish day schools. It is also a way to rescue students of all backgrounds from failing public schools, they argue.

But opponents fear that using vouchers to pay for religious school education will erode the separation of church and state. They also worry that vouchers will harm those public schools most in need of help by siphoning off the best students and the money that has paid for their education.

Under the plan, state officials will continue an existing policy of grading all public schools. Students in the worst schools would qualify for the program. All students of those schools, regardless of income or grades, would then be eligible for vouchers of at least \$4,000 per school year.

In the first year, beginning in the fall of 1999, students at four Florida schools out of 3,000 statewide will be eligible for the program. Local officials expect the number of failing schools to rise to 170.

Florida's schools are regarded as some of the worst in the nation, and consistently rank near the bottom in national surveys based on standardized test scores.

Florida's program is not expected to affect attendance at Jewish day schools. No Jewish students are expected to be eligible for vouchers in the first year of the program and few, if any, would qualify in the second year, local Jewish activists said.

Most Jewish activists in Florida vigorously oppose the voucher measure.

"We believe that public funding going to private schools would direct funds from the neediest public schools and the neediest students and truly undermine the public education system," said Sam Dubbin, chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. "And we believe that public money

### Israeli toll rises in Lebanon

An Israeli soldier was killed and another moderately wounded Monday in the southern Lebanon security zone by a roadside bomb planted by Hezbollah gunmen.

Staff Sgt. Molo Negato, 23, was the oldest of eight children in his family, which immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia nine years ago. Nine Israeli soldiers have now been killed in the region this year.

### Israel protests 'embassy' plan

Israel is planning to seek U.S. intervention to prevent the Palestinian Authority from raising its representative offices abroad to embassy status, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Monday.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman, David Bar-Illan, told the paper that such a move would violate the Oslo accords. His comments came after Palestinian Authority official Nabil Sha'ath announced the move over the weekend.

### Israeli vote from abroad to start

Though two weeks remain before Israel's May 17 elections, diplomats serving abroad will begin casting their ballots Tuesday.

The first polling station to open will be at the Israeli mission in Wellington, New Zealand, followed by 101 other polling stations at Israeli diplomatic offices around the world.

Some 3,650 permanent Israeli diplomatic staff and emissaries are eligible to cast ballots until Thursday. The votes, which will be sent by diplomatic pouch to the Foreign Ministry in Israel, will be tallied with the rest of the nation's vote when Election Day ends.

### Filing date set for Shoah victims

Needy Holocaust survivors in Israel can begin applying next month for payments from a \$180 million fund for Shoah victims set up by Swiss banks and industry in 1997, according to an Israeli Finance Ministry official.

Those survivors with a monthly income less than \$875 will be eligible to apply, the official added Monday. The head of an umbrella organization for Israeli survivors, Noah Flug, complained that the application process is beginning months after American survivors received money from the same fund. Flug blamed Israeli bureaucracy for the delay.

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Netanyahu ad draws criticism

Relatives of Israelis killed in suicide bombings complained Monday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used in televised campaign ads photos of bus bombings launched by Islamic militants during the previous Labor government.

The ads warned that the attacks would resume if he loses the May 17 election.

### PLO leader publishes memoirs

A former PLO leader acknowledged for the first time in a book published Monday that he planned the attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics that resulted in the deaths of 11 Israeli athletes.

In his autobiography, "Palestine: From Jerusalem to Munich," Abu Daoud said his commandos never intended to harm the athletes. He blames their deaths on the German police and then-Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.

### Arabs rally against premier

Thousands of Israeli Arabs demonstrated against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a protest Saturday in Nazareth.

The demonstrators called for the ouster of Netanyahu and his governing Likud Party in the May 17 elections.

The votes of Israeli Arabs, who make up 12 percent of the electorate according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, could prove crucial in the tight race for prime minister.

### Israeli reservist sentenced

An Israeli army reserve major was sentenced Monday to 20 years for the 1997 murder of a British tourist.

In March, a court convicted Daniel Okev of the shooting death of the tourist, Jeffrey Hunter, and wounding Hunter's girlfriend, Charlotte Gibb, after he picked up the two hitchhikers near Eilat.



## Daily News Bulletin

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going to parochial schools is an inappropriate encroachment on the separation between church and state, which we have always opposed," he said.

On the other side of the debate, Orthodox Union officials thanked Bush and Florida lawmakers for "setting an example of leadership and commitment."

In a letter to Bush, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, president of the O.U., and Nathan Diamant, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs, wrote that "the Orthodox community is committed to securing greater educational opportunities and empowerment for all American children and we believe school-choice initiatives are a powerful tool to secure this critical goal."

The program is already under attack from church-state watchdogs.

"This voucher program highlights what's wrong with voucher programs generally. It zeroes in on failing schools, redirecting money to other schools and leaving the failing schools even worse off," said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department.

"It's compounded when you add the church-state problems," he said.

Voucher opponents had been discussing their legal strategy even before the bill passed the Florida legislature.

"This legislation ignores the U.S. Constitution, the state constitution and several court rulings that clearly say that taxpayers cannot be forced to finance private religious education," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

But state officials and voucher proponents believe that the law will pass constitutional muster, in part because religious schools that accept the vouchers cannot require students to participate in religious activity. They can, however, teach religion classes.

Breger said that the way the Florida legislation is formulated makes it difficult for opponents to claim that vouchers are intended as a backdoor way to aid parochial schools.

"The rationale is neutral: to help students in schools that have failed," he said.

Although Florida is the first state to adopt such a program, Cleveland and Milwaukee already have citywide voucher programs.

And in New York City, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is crafting a voucher program, much to the dismay of the city's schools chancellor.

On the state level, Maine and Vermont have targeted vouchers for students who live in rural areas without public schools.

In Maine, small towns that do not have their own public school systems provide vouchers to cover the costs for children to attend nearby non-religious public or private schools.

Last week, the Maine Supreme Court upheld a lower court's ruling that prevented five families from using state-funded vouchers to send their children to a church-affiliated school. □

## Czech police arrest extremists

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech riot police have detained more than 20 anarchists and skinheads after the two groups clashed during May Day demonstrations in the center of the Czech Republic's capital.

After the police separated the groups last Saturday, some 300 skinheads marched through the city, chanting slogans such as "Zionists Out" and "Arbeit Macht Frei" — or "Work Will Make You Free," the slogan posted over the gates of some Nazi concentration camps.

"I'm very unhappy with how the police dealt with the whole situation, the way they protected the skins and not the anarchists," said Milos Pojar, director of the Education and Culture Center of the Prague Jewish Museum. "I was disgusted."

Representatives of the anti-racist Movement of Civic Solidarity and Tolerance said they had videotaped evidence of skinheads giving Nazi salutes and wearing fascist insignia.

They said they planned to file legal complaints against some of the demonstrators. Promoting racism or anti-Semitism is a crime in the Czech Republic. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### U.S. softens Iran criticism

The United States softened its criticism of Iran by dropping its designation of Tehran as "the most active" state sponsor of terrorism in its annual report on terrorism.

The report, which continues to list Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Cuba and North Korea along with Iran as sponsors of terrorism, noted that the Palestinian Authority has acted against several terrorists and stopped several attacks against Israel.

Last year's 273 international terrorist attacks marked the lowest total since 1971, but caused a record 741 deaths and 5,952 injuries, according to the report.

### U.S. general has Jewish roots

The American general leading the NATO military operation against Yugoslavia discovered his Jewish roots as an adult, The New York Times reported Monday.

Gen. Wesley Kanne Clark, who was raised as a Protestant in Little Rock, Ark., embraced his background when he learned of it in his 20s, according to several family members.

His grandfather, Jacob Nemerovsky, fled Russia in the 1890s during an anti-Semitic pogrom, the paper said.

### Moroccan Jews form peace lobby

Moroccan Jews announced the creation of a group to lobby for Middle East peace.

The announcement came during a meeting Sunday of the World Rally for Moroccan Jews in Marrakech. The biggest delegation to the conference came from Israel, which has some 600,000 Jews of Moroccan origin.

### Terrorist ordered deported

Canadian immigration officials last week ordered the deportation of a convicted Palestinian terrorist who entered Canada under false pretenses in 1987.

Mahmoud Mohammad Issa Mohammad, a former member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, threw grenades and sprayed gunfire at an El Al Boeing 707 aircraft in Athens in 1968, killing a retired Israeli naval commander.

### 'Parade' gets 9 Tony nominations

A musical about the 1915 lynching of Jewish factory owner Leo Frank received nine Tony nominations Monday, more than any other Broadway play or musical.

"Parade," which was nominated in categories including best director, best book and best score, was a commercial flop, closing after a 10-week run with a loss of more than \$5 million.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Worker for interethnic peace frets as war touches Macedonia

By Michael J. Jordan

SKOPJE, Macedonia (JTA) — Eran Frankel has a lot invested in the Balkans, and as the Kosovo conflict threatens to widen, he is watching nervously.

The Jerusalem-born American works in Macedonia as head of the nonprofit Search for Common Ground. For five years, the group has worked to bring together Macedonians and their large ethnic Albanian minority.

Among the group's projects are Macedonia's first three bilingual, ethnically mixed preschools, modeled after Israel's Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam school for Arab and Jewish children. But now, Frankel's work is unraveling before his eyes.

Despite a month of NATO airstrikes, Serbia is continuing its campaign of killings and forced deportations of Albanians from its southern province of Kosovo. The tidal wave of 135,000 refugees that has hit Macedonia since NATO began its air campaign now threatens that country's own delicate ethnic balance.

"I've been very depressed and worried for weeks," Frankel said recently in his Skopje office, which is adorned with Turkish-style carpets and beaded crafts from across the Balkans. "Unfortunately, the power to destroy and make things worse is now in the hands of those who can do it in an instant. So I don't see the situation getting better any time soon."

As the calls for NATO ground troops grow louder, many Macedonians believe that it's only a matter of time before their own country is engulfed in civil war.

Before the Kosovo crisis, Macedonia's Albanian minority was officially counted as 23 percent of the population, but was said to be closer to one-third. Yet few political forums exist for Macedonians and Albanians to resolve their differences together, Frankel said. Since Macedonia gained its independence in 1992 from Yugoslavia, the two communities have lived almost entirely apart.

Macedonians and Albanians speak different languages, attend different schools and live in segregated areas. While Macedonians are generally Orthodox Christian, Albanians are mostly Muslim. Mixed marriages are virtually unknown.

When conflict arises, political rhetoric usually degenerates into nationalism and chauvinism. That's where the SCG stepped in.

The objective of the Washington-based organization is to foster interethnic tolerance and gradually empower both communities. The SCG targeted the primary sources of intolerance — the schools and media. It juggles more than one dozen projects that bring together Macedonians and Albanians, along with the smaller minorities of Turks and Romani, or Gypsies.

The projects focus not on overcoming differences, but on stressing what they have in common, such as preserving the environment.

"We try to show them that there are innumerable issues in one community that also affect members of another community," Frankel said. "It's not that you breathe Albanian air and I breathe Macedonian air. Clean air and water are issues you can't divide by ethnicity."

Much of Frankel's work has been with the Macedonian- and Albanian-language media. He gives them mixed reviews in their coverage of the Kosovo crisis.

"With a few exceptions, they've reported the events fairly and not advocated of a certain point of view," he said. "But I'm disappointed they haven't tried to engage the country as a whole in an interethnic approach to resolving the crisis. On the other hand, the fact they haven't inflamed the situation is a big change."

Meanwhile, the SCG's projects are in limbo. Frankel says he is "just facilitating" and trying to "act constructively." One activity has been to work with a local Albanian newspaper, listing the names of Kosovar Albanian children separated from their parents. But mostly, Frankel watches as SCG's modest gains disintegrate.

"Even if the bombing ends tomorrow, this means years of more work for us," he said. "This crisis has dramatically undermined the little confidence Macedonians had that they were on a path of self-determination." □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Arafat enjoys renewed standing in West and among his own people***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — This was the week that had been prophesied as doomsday for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

For months, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat had been threatening to unilaterally declare statehood on May 4. During that same period, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu just as persistently stated that Israel would respond to such a declaration by annexing chunks of the West Bank.

May 4 marks the end of the interim period envisioned under the Oslo accords, by which time Israel and the Palestinian Authority were to have completed their final-status negotiations.

But with the Oslo process frozen and the final-status talks only off to a largely ceremonial start, Arafat repeatedly threatened that the Palestinian Authority was entitled to declare statehood without consulting the Israelis.

He took that message to more than 20 countries in recent months, during which time he convinced world leaders to back Palestinian statehood if he postponed the unilateral declaration.

As Tuesday approached, Arafat parlayed that international support into a decision that brought Israel and the Palestinians back from the brink.

Last week, during a meeting in the Gaza Strip of the Palestinian Central Council, the mini-parliament of the Palestine Liberation Organization overwhelmingly voted to put off the declaration until after Israel's May elections.

In its April 29 decision, the council declared its session "open-ended" — meaning it would take a wait-and-see attitude toward the Israeli elections before convening its next session in June.

"If the new Israeli government is a government of peace," said Faisal Hussein, the Palestinians' top official in Jerusalem, "then we will renew negotiations."

"If not," he added, "then we will feel free to declare independence."

Husseini did not say which government he would consider a government of peace.

After all, he said, the Palestinian Authority has no desire to interfere in the Israeli elections.

It is no secret that the Palestinians oppose the re-election of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who claimed last week that his threat to annex portions of the West Bank had been responsible for Arafat's decision to defer the statehood declaration.

But most analysts here agreed that it was Arafat and the Palestinian people who had gained most from the postponement.

Reserve Col. Shalom Harari, a former Arab affairs adviser at Israel's Defense Ministry, suggested that Arafat had made a relatively small concession — postponing the declaration — in return for international support of eventual Palestinian statehood.

Arafat also scored big because the Palestinian Authority's "level of intimacy in relations with the United States has increased," Harari added, referring to a letter President Clinton sent to Arafat as the Central Council was set to convene.

While Clinton, unlike his European counterparts, did not offer his backing for statehood if the declaration were postponed, he did reiterate a stance he took during a visit to the Gaza Strip late last

year — that he supports Palestinian aspirations to live as a free people in their own land. He also said he would press Israel to conclude the final-status talks within a year.

Another prize Arafat won in exchange for the postponement of the declaration came from the European Union, which on March 26 issued a statement from Berlin giving its unequivocal backing for eventual Palestinian statehood.

"This is much more than the Balfour Declaration," Menahem Klein, a member of the political science department at Bar-Ilan University, told JTA. He was referring to the 1917 British declaration favoring the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Noting that the Balfour Declaration came in the form of a private letter written by British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour, Klein added, "The Berlin declaration and Clinton's letter are in effect much more. They are a [public] declaration of support by both the United States and the Europeans for Palestinian independence."

"The entire world community agrees now that the question is no longer whether a Palestinian state should be proclaimed, but when this should take place," Hussein said.

Arafat scored another big prize last week when he closed ranks with Hamas.

The founder of the Islamic militant group, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, who until a few weeks ago had been placed under house arrest by the Palestinian Authority, was invited to last week's meeting in Gaza as a guest of honor. Yassin gave his silent blessing to Arafat's tactics.

According to most observers, terror campaigns launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad during Israel's 1996 election campaign had played a large part in determining the outcome of that vote.

But following the Knesset vote last December to hold early elections, there have been no terror attacks, a situation that Harari described as "amazing."

"Ever since the announcement of early elections in Israel, the volume of Palestinian unrest has decreased drastically," he said.

"This proves that when the Palestinian Authority so wishes, it can reduce terrorism and general unrest."

Even before last week's meeting, he said, Arafat had convinced Hamas, the major opposition force in the Palestinian political community, that terrorist attacks on the eve of the Israeli elections would be counterproductive to Palestinian interests.

The support Arafat won last week from the Palestinian Central Council should not be underestimated.

In the past, there was strong opposition by radical groups within the PLO to declaring independence before all of pre-state Palestine comes under their control and before all Palestinian refugees who fled during Israel's 1948 War of Independence could return there.

The council's decision signals that many of those who were opposed to the peace process have amended their stance.

Hamas, too, has participated in this changed agenda.

Mahmoud Zahar, the Hamas spokesman in Gaza, wrote over the weekend in the eastern Jerusalem newspaper Al Kuds that Hamas supports the creation of a Palestinian state even on a relatively small portion of pre-state Palestine.

As Klein of Bar-Ilan University pointed out, Hamas has come a long way toward sharing Arafat's views — which has made Arafat's victory last week in Gaza even sweeter. □