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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Moscow Jewish leader stabbed

The business manager of Moscow's Jewish Arts Center was hospitalized in serious condition after he was attacked by a young man wielding a knife.

Leopold Kaimovsky was wounded in the face, stomach and leg after a religious service Tuesday in the Choral Synagogue, which houses the art center's offices. [Page 4]

Jewish editor on 'hit list'

The editor of a Jewish newspaper was named along with 31 others on a possible "hit list" found by FBI agents in the home of two brothers arrested for the murder of a homosexual couple and also linked to last month's arson attacks on three Sacramento-area synagogues.

"Frankly, I don't feel like I'm in any danger," Marc Klein, editor and publisher of the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, wrote in a commentary.

"Still, there is something disconcerting about being on a list put together by two men already suspected of murder."

Clinton OKs Lockheed launches

President Clinton agreed to allow U.S.-based aerospace company Lockheed Martin to increase this year's commercial rocket launches in Russia from 16 to 20 after the United States received assurances that Russia would impose new restrictions on the export of missile technology to Iran.

Also on Tuesday, a House subcommittee heard testimony about the Iran Nonproliferation Act, a measure that would ban U.S. aid to the Russian space program if the president finds that Russia is helping Iran obtain missile technology or weapons of mass destruction.

Leah Rabin may be U.N. envoy

Leah Rabin is being weighed as a candidate to serve as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, two Israeli newspapers reported Tuesday.

"If the post is offered to me seriously, I would consider it favorably," the widow of assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot. Other candidates for the post are Center Party legislator and former Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo and Yehuda Lankri, a confidante of Foreign Minister David Levy.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Flap over terror panel appointee erodes ties between U.S. Jews, Arabs

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — House Minority leader Richard Gephardt's (D-Mo.) decision to withdraw the appointment of a prominent American Muslim leader to a congressional commission on terrorism has opened a seismic rift between Jews and Arabs in America.

Gephardt's decision came after Jewish organizations protested that Salam Al-Marayati, who heads the Los-Angeles based Muslim Public Affairs Council, had condoned acts of terrorism against Israel.

Several members of Congress had also raised objections, urging the FBI to fully investigate whether Al-Marayati was qualified to serve on the newly created 10-member National Commission on Terrorism, which is charged with reviewing national policy on terrorism.

In a letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Gephardt said the process of gaining a security clearance would take longer than the six-month life of the commission itself. Aides said political considerations did not influence the decision.

Infuriated by Gephardt's reversal, Arabs and Muslim leaders have rallied behind Al-Marayati, defending him as a voice of moderation. They blame American Jewish leaders for misrepresenting him as part of what they are calling a larger "witch hunt" to exclude Arabs and Muslims from government policy-making positions.

They point to a recent campaign to oust Joseph Zogby, the first Arab American to work for the State Department's Near East bureau in decades, from his post. Some Jewish organizational officials objected to Zogby because of articles he wrote criticizing Israel. Earlier this year, some Jewish officials opposed the appointment of Al-Marayati's wife, Laila, to an international commission on religious freedom.

In a joint statement issued Monday, nine American Muslim and Arab American organizations called on Gephardt to reinstate Al-Marayati, saying they were "appalled by the McCarthyite tactics applied by extremists seeking to sabotage this appointment and muzzle our communities' authentic voices in order to monopolize discussion."

Jewish officials dismiss the notion of a conspiracy to keep Arab or Muslims out of government. The controversy surrounding the terrorism commission, they say, has nothing to do with Al-Marayati's ethnic or religious background and comes down solely to his statements on terrorism.

The flap has added another stress point to already strained relations between American Jews and American Arabs that is certain to complicate efforts to revive intergroup dialogue. It has even caused tensions among Jews, with some Los Angeles Jewish activists backing Al-Marayati and condemning the Jewish organizations who campaigned against him.

Relations between American Jews and American Arabs and Muslims have taken a tumultuous course since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993.

As the peace process has foundered in recent years, the goodwill and dialogue that grew out of the signing at the White House has given way to a series of grievances and an almost complete breakdown in communication.

Now, amid renewed optimism for peace in the Middle East with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's assumption of power, Arab and Muslim leaders in America say the episode is particularly distressing. Khalil Jahshan, president of the National As-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Envoy: U.S. to change role

The United States is likely to resume the role of facilitator rather than active mediator in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, according to the U.S. ambassador to Israel.

During a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Monday, Edward Walker also said President Clinton believes the election of Prime Minister Ehud Barak provides a "golden opportunity" to boost U.S.-Israeli relations.

Barak, Abdullah confer in Amman

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak concluded a series of confidence-building meetings with Arab leaders by holding talks in Amman with Jordan's King Abdullah.

Barak is slated to meet next with President Clinton and other U.S. officials starting Thursday. On his way back to Israel next week, he will meet in London with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, according to Israeli officials.

Cabinet bill passes first hurdle

A bill to expand the Israeli Cabinet from 18 to 24 ministers passed the first of three required votes in the Knesset.

Most of the coalition of Prime Minister Ehud Barak backed his initiative, with the motion passing by a 69-38 margin.

New settler leader elected

Settler leaders elected the mayor of Israel's largest settlement to serve as chairman of the Council of Jewish Settlements.

Benny Kashriel, of Ma'aleh Adumim, will represent some 172,000 settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

He replaces Pinchas Wallerstein, who stepped down after former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was defeated in the May elections.



Daily News Bulletin

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sociation of Arab Americans, said the controversy has done "extremely important and significant damage" to Jewish-Arab relations, "especially when you consider the fact that there is very little trust and working relations in existence at this time."

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said the allegation that Al-Marayati poses a security threat is "dangerous" and "repugnant," adding, "People need to think about what that means."

Zogby, whose son, Joseph, was at the center of the State Department controversy, added that he was "very distressed that some responsible leaders in the Jewish community have bought into the effort to defame" Al-Marayati.

Following word of Al-Marayati's appointment last month, which came at the recommendation of David Bonior (D-Mich.), the Democratic whip of the U.S. House of Representatives, Gephardt's office was flooded by letters of protest from groups including the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Zionist Organization of America, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League.

Although Al-Marayati has said he condemns terrorism, he has come under fire for a series of statements that Jewish officials say justify terrorism, equate America's struggle for independence with Islamic fundamentalism and call for a renewed Arab economic boycott of Israel. A March 1997 MPAC statement found on the group's Web site, for example, asserts that Israel's prime minister "bears the brunt of responsibility for the loss of innocent lives" following a Hamas suicide bombing attack.

"Because the Palestinian people have no avenues to redress their grievances," the statement said, "some of them have been pushed beyond the margins of society and have adopted violent reactions to express their despair and suffering."

The 38-year-old Al-Marayati has lived in the United States since his family fled political persecution in Iraq when he was 4. He has been active in the Democratic Party and has been invited to attend events at the State Department and White House, including two Middle East peace signings. He currently serves on Los Angeles' Human Relations Commission and has worked over the years with local Jewish leaders to forge greater ties between their communities.

Al-Marayati did not return phone calls seeking comment, but was quoted by The Washington Post as condemning Jewish "pressure tactics" in "imposing their agenda."

David Harris, executive director of the AJCommittee, said the attempt to cast Jewish opposition to Al-Marayati's appointment as an "anti-Muslim, anti-Arab framework," is a "predictable and unfortunate tactic."

"The issue is not nor has it been ethnic nor religious background," he said. "The issue is qualifications or lack thereof, and if it had been a Christian or a Jew holding the same views, we would have been equally forceful."

Morton Klein, president of the ZOA, called Al-Marayati's statements "appalling" and said that if mainstream Arab American groups are standing behind him, "then we're going to have a serious problem" with them.

Although a spokeswoman for Gephardt said this week that the congressman was considering appointing another American Muslim to take Al-Marayati's place on the panel, as far as Arab and Muslim groups are concerned, the damage has been done.

Some Jewish figures in Los Angeles rallied behind Al-Marayati, saying they would continue to work with him, and others appeared with him at a news conference last Friday.

Rabbi Emeritus Leonard Beerman of Leo Baeck Temple charged, "This assault on Al-Marayati by a consortium of Jewish organizations is for me, as a rabbi and as a Jew, an appalling display of ignorance, mindlessness and arrogance."

"In an attempt to dishonor a good man, I think these organizations have dishonored themselves," The Los Angeles Times quoted Beerman as saying.

Jahshan, for his part, said he hoped that "somehow in the future people of goodwill on both sides can still get together and begin to forge a steady alliance, peace process or no peace process. Instead of following initiatives from overseas," he said, "I think we should set the example for others who are trying to negotiate peace."

As for what it will take to get to that point, however, Arab and Jewish Americans now appear at a loss.

(JTA correspondent Tom Tugend in Los Angeles contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Nazi-looted painting returned

A Nazi-looted painting by a German artist was recently returned to its Jewish owners in the United States.

The move came after the City Council in the city of Linz, Austria, where the painting had hung in a museum since the 1950s, voted to return "The Seamstress" by Lesser Ury to the family of Louis Lowenthal, a prewar art collector. Lowenthal's grandson, Michael, said he plans to donate the work to a Jewish museum.

Official wary about German talks

New York City's comptroller is "skeptical" that the German government and business community will reach an agreement to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers by a Sept. 1 deadline.

Alan Hevesi, who heads a group of U.S. financial officials monitoring the resolution of Holocaust-era issues, told the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany on Tuesday that talks aimed at providing the compensation have slowed.

Alleged Nazi can stay in Canada

A Canadian judge ruled that an 81-year-old British Columbia resident can stay in Canada despite allegations that he worked as a guard at a Nazi-run camp in Latvia from 1941 to 1943.

Eduards Podins was on the Nazi payroll as an auxiliary police officer, but the judge found that he had actually worked as a shopkeeper.

The judge also ruled that since Podins was not asked about his wartime experience when he entered Canada from Britain in 1959, he cannot be accused of lying about his wartime record.

Mauthausen concert planned

The Vienna Philharmonic is scheduled to play a concert next May at the site of the Mauthausen concentration camp. The concert, during which the orchestra will play Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is being seen as the beginning of the country's attempt to face up to its support for the Nazis during World War II.

Members of the philharmonic failed to protest when their fellow Jewish members were expelled in 1938, nor did they respond when six were sent to concentration camps and killed.

Mbeki to open Jewish gathering

South Africa's new president is scheduled to open the country's Jewish Board of Deputies national congress next month.

Thabo Mbeki also opened the group's congress in 1995, when he was deputy president of the African National Congress.

Nelson Mandela spoke at the 1993 congress, two years before the country's first democratic elections.

DNA test puts to rest mystery of one missing Yemenite child

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A painful chapter in the life of Menachem Sharabi's family has been closed after a genetic test on the remains of a child's grave confirmed the identity of his sister, Leah, who died some four decades ago.

But for Sharabi, the news could not undo 40 years of hurt and uncertainty his family suffered, not knowing whether his sister had died or was taken for illegal adoption — as some members of the Yemenite community in Israel allege happened to hundreds of children who disappeared during the early years of the state.

Some members of the Yemenite community have long believed that their children were kidnapped and sold to Ashkenazi families, but the results of DNA tests performed in Britain and announced Monday indicated that at least in the case of Leah Sharabi, this did not happen.

Just the same, her brother is angry that Israeli officials never informed the family of her death.

Menachem Sharabi also questioned why the family kept "getting notices from the election board, the income tax authority" as well as from other places "indicating that she is still alive."

He agreed that the DNA results represented the "closing of a circle," but added, "Why didn't they tell us? What were they afraid to tell us?"

Sharabi was among the members of 10 Yemenite families who were informed by Health Minister Shlomo Benizri of the DNA results on remains exhumed from 10 children's graves at a cemetery in central Israel.

The graves were exhumed three years ago at the request of the families in order to determine whether their children had indeed been buried there.

The DNA tests were able to determine the family origins of only one set of remains, Benizri told the families.

He said the decomposition of the other remains, as well as the limitations of current technology, make it impossible for the British pathologists to draw sufficient genetic material to conduct the other tests.

"At this point, we have done all that we can with the available technology.

"Perhaps in several more years we would be able to learn more," the health minister said.

For the families, the report prompted mixed reactions.

Shlomo Ba'agali, whose infant son disappeared, said he still hopes his son is alive.

"How can it be that we brought him [alive] and in the morning they told us he is gone?" he told reporters after hearing the results.

"I will not be quiet until I die."

Rami Tsuberi, a lawyer who has represented Yemenite families in the disappearance cases, said he would continue to seek answers.

The disappearance of the Yemenite children in the 1950s is one of the most painful chapters in the early history of the State of Israel.

It spawned several inquiries, including a state commission that is still active.

Previous panels concluded that most of the children, who arrived in the large immigration waves of the early 1950s, died of various illnesses.

The panels suggested that disorganization in the new state's medical and administrative institutions, as well as communication gaps between health workers and the newly arrived Yemenite immigrants, led to poor record-keeping and confusion over the fate of the children.

DNA testing played a major role in a case that made headlines in Israel almost two years ago.

In August 1997, an Israeli woman from Yemen was thought to have been reunited with her biological daughter on the basis of genetic testing.

But subsequent DNA tests indicated that Tzila Levine was not the long-lost daughter of Margalit Omassi, who immigrated to the Jewish state from Yemen in the late 1940s. □

Poll reveals most Jews in U.S. like Barak, support peace talks

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jews have a favorable view of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak by a 30-to-1 margin, according to a poll released this week by the Israel Policy Forum.

The survey also found overwhelming support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, with 88 percent of respondents expressing support, while 11 percent said they oppose it.

Israel Policy Forum, a group that supports the peace process, released the poll on the eve of Barak's first visit to Washington since his election as prime minister.

When asked who they would have voted for in Israel's May election, 58 percent said Barak, compared with 22 percent who would have favored his opponent Benjamin Netanyahu.

Anticipating a battle on Capitol Hill if Israel and Syria reach a peace agreement, the group asked whether the United States should provide troops to a peace-keeping force if Israel returns the Golan Heights to Syria. Forty-six percent said yes and 44 percent said no.

"Since it is no secret that American Jewish opinion has an important role to play in setting the domestic political context for U.S. policies in the Middle East, this poll is very good news for Ehud Barak as well as President Clinton," said Michael Sonnenfeldt, chairman of the IPF.

On other peace process issues, 73 percent of respondents said Barak will do a better job than Netanyahu in moving the peace process forward.

On domestic political issues, the poll revealed a politically active Jewish population.

Some 35 percent of respondents said they gave a campaign contribution since 1996, and 37 percent said they had contacted a member of Congress during the last year. Some 75 percent identified themselves as Democrats compared with 16 percent as Republicans.

President Clinton enjoyed a 69 percent favorable rating, some 16 percentage points higher than recent surveys of the general population. Only 32 percent of those polled viewed GOP presidential candidate Texas Gov. George W. Bush favorably. Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic frontrunner, scored a 73 percent favorable rating.

The survey of 606 American Jews, conducted from June 27 to July 1, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent. □

Leading Moscow Jew stabbed; attacker says he'll 'kill all of you'

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The business manager of Moscow's Jewish Arts Center was hospitalized in serious condition after he was attacked by a young man wielding a knife.

Leopold Kaimovsky, 52, was wounded in the face, stomach and leg Tuesday after a religious service in the Choral Synagogue, which houses the art center's offices.

Security officials at the synagogue subdued the attacker until police arrested him.

As he was taken away, the assailant shouted, "There are 50,000 of us. We will kill all of you anyway," according to Pavel Feldblum, the executive vice president of the Moscow Jewish Community, whose office is also located in the synagogue.

The man, identified by police by his last name, Krivchun, is a 20-year-old student at a Moscow university who has confessed to a plan to set the synagogue on fire, according to police investigators.

A longtime Jewish activist, Kaimovsky is a well-known member of Moscow's Jewish community.

Immediately after the attack, police could not confirm whether the assailant was a member of any neo-Nazi group, but the 50,000 number that the assailant mentioned is the most frequently cited estimate of members of Russian National Unity, Russia's largest and best-organized neo-Nazi group.

The attack is sending shock waves throughout Moscow's Jewish community.

In the afternoon, Jews from across the Russian capital flocked to the synagogue, which is located in the center of the city just a few blocks away from the Kremlin.

"I came to find out if any help is needed," said a young man who gave his name as Boris. "I could never think this can happen in Moscow," he added, as he looked at the main staircase covered with blood.

Russia's chief rabbi accused authorities for what many here see as a failure to crack down on prominent hard-liners who have made inflammatory statements in the past year.

"This is a result of the absolute impunity of the people who are making anti-Semitic statements," said Rabbi Adolf Shayevich, referring to Communist lawmaker Albert Makashov and Russian National Unity leader Alexander Barkashov.

Russian and Moscow authorities have not yet commented on the incident.

In Washington, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry contacted the Russian Embassy, urging that Russia provide security to Russian Jewish institutions. □

Lord's Prayer case aired in Canada

TORONTO (JTA) — A human rights tribunal in Saskatchewan is hearing arguments over whether the Lord's Prayer should continue to be allowed in public school classrooms there.

Courts in at least three other Canadian provinces have ruled that classroom prayer interferes with national and local laws.

In Saskatchewan, however, a 1905 law stipulates that religion be included in school activities, and Christian groups in the province assert that it refers specifically to Christianity.

Nine parents from Jewish, Muslim, Unitarian and other backgrounds filed a complaint with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Tribunal in 1993.

According to Gary Haiven, a Jewish man and one of the nine parents who filed the complaint, Canada is now sufficiently multicultural that there's no reason to make a significant segment of the classroom feel excluded.

"My parents accepted it because they were new to the country," he said.

"I feel a lot more confident about my place in Canadian society. We'd simply like this practice to end."

The case is due to be decided in the coming days. □