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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Ayatollah adamant about Iran 13

Iran's spiritual leader told visiting Austrian President Thomas Klestil that Iran "asks nobody's permission to punish" the 13 Iranian Jews arrested in March for spying for the United States and Israel.

Klestil brought up the fate of the 13 on Tuesday during what was the first visit to Iran by a European leader since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly said of the detainees, whose court appearance has yet to be scheduled, "If their crime is proved by the court, they will probably be punished."

Jewish leaders confer with Bush

U.S. Jewish leaders met Wednesday with Texas Gov. George W. Bush in Austin to discuss Jewish concerns.

More than 25 officials took part in the private session with the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination.

The meeting covered such topics as the Middle East peace process, the separation of church and state, and gun violence, Jewish officials said.

Barak vows 'Never Again'

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak pledged "Never Again" during a visit to the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin.

"Never will we leave ourselves without the means to defend our life or be at the mercy of other people," the premier said in Hebrew on Wednesday after touring the site with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

The chancellor, who wore a skullcap during a memorial service at the camp, called on Germans never to forget their past.

Poll: Russians stereotype Jews

More than 4 out of 10 Russians hold strong anti-Semitic views, according to a survey released by the Anti-Defamation League.

The poll found that 44 percent of the respondents embrace a range of stereotypes about Jews, including a belief that Jews exercise too much power in Russia and in world business, and that Jews "are ready to use unscrupulous means to achieve their aims."

An overwhelming majority of respondents also are in despair over Russia's future. [Page 4]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish groups drop out of coalition for Religious Liberty Protection Act

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — There was a time when the task of securing greater protections for religious freedom in America seemed relatively unobjectionable.

A diverse coalition of religious and civil liberties groups formed to pursue that goal following a landmark 1990 Supreme Court decision that struck down key protections for free religious practice. Congress passed legislation in 1993 to restore those protections, and President Clinton signed it.

Even when the Supreme Court struck down that act as unconstitutional in 1997, religious leaders and members of Congress were determined to draft a new bill to fill the void left by the court.

But now, with the Religious Liberty Protection Act pending in Congress, that coalition — which spans the ideological gamut and includes every major Jewish organization — finds itself in tatters.

The coalition broke down last week when several groups — including the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Churches and the Baptist Joint Committee — announced they could no longer support the bill in its current form.

The groups say they continue to support the bill's principle of creating a law that allows people to practice their religion free from government intrusion. But concerns about whether religious liberty or civil rights laws should take precedence when the two come into conflict have complicated the matter.

The measure, which passed the House of Representatives in July by a 306-118 vote, would prevent state and local governments from placing a "substantial burden" on an individual's free exercise of religion unless officials make a compelling case for doing so — and only then through the "least restrictive means."

The legislation seeks to remedy what supporters say are numerous cases in which laws have needlessly interfered with religious practices.

Supporters have pointed, among other things, to city ordinances that have prevented synagogues and other houses of worship from expanding, policies that prohibit Jewish children from wearing yarmulkas in schools and laws that conflict with the Orthodox prohibition against autopsies, and the practice of giving sacramental wine to minors.

Although the House adopted the bill by a wide margin, liberal Democrats, including the majority of Jewish lawmakers, voted against it, citing civil rights concerns.

As Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), an original sponsor of the bill who opposed it in the end, put it: "RLPA should be a shield for the religious liberty of all — not a sword against the civil rights of some."

At issue for the lawmakers, as well as some of the religious groups that withdrew their support last week, is the question of whether the proposed legislation could be used to justify violations of state or local anti-discrimination laws. Opponents argue that landlords and employers in states and cities with laws prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals could invoke their religious principles as a defense for refusing to rent to or hire gays and lesbians.

Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center, said his group decided to withdraw support for the bill out of political expediency and concern over contentious debate on the issue in the Senate.

Looking at the political landscape, he said, it became clear there was "no realistic

MIDEAST FOCUS

Detainee: Buses were targets

An Israeli Arab arrested in connection with two car bomb blasts earlier this month told investigators the explosives were intended to be planted on buses.

Ibrahim Abed al-Magid Salah, 20, confirmed the assessment of investigators that the bombs exploded prematurely in Haifa and Tiberias and were not intended to be used in suicide attacks.

Salah said that he and three other men, who died when the bombs exploded prematurely, planned to plant the bombs on two major bus lines, Haifa-Jerusalem and Tiberias-Jerusalem.

Israel offers to help Taiwan

Israeli officials offered to dispatch medical assistance to Taiwan, which suffered a devastating earthquake Tuesday.

About 70 Israelis, mostly businesspeople and students, were believed to be in Taiwan at the time of the temblor.

Israel's Trade and Culture Mission in Taipei, aided by Israeli volunteers, has made contact with or obtained information about the whereabouts of most of the 70.

Jordan arrests Hamas officials

Jordan arrested three Hamas officials when they arrived in Amman from Tehran on Wednesday.

Last month the Jordanian government closed Hamas offices in Amman and issued arrest warrants for the three — Khaled Mashaal, Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook and Ibrahim Shosheh — who were at the time in Iran.

Barak names adviser

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak named a former journalist and spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington as his communications adviser.

Gadi Baltiansky will be responsible for contacts with the foreign press in Israel.

chance of this bill being passed this year" and that "any debate would be a bruising one. "It would be bruising," he added "not just for the participants, but more importantly for the concept of religious liberty."

It remained unclear, however, whether the Religious Action Center and other groups would actively oppose the bill or simply remain silent on it.

ADL, for its part, said it remained firmly committed to the principles behind the act and would continue to work with other faith and civil rights groups to enact the broadest possible protections for religious liberty in light of the opposition.

The ADL might ultimately support a narrower version of the legislation that focuses on areas such as zoning ordinances, prisoner's rights and autopsies, according to Michael Lieberman, the group's Washington counsel. Such a bill would avoid the civil rights controversies related to housing and employment.

At the same time, Lieberman said the ADL will continue to lead an effort to enact individual religious freedom statutes on a state-by-state basis.

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs and a leading proponent of the bill, said the breakdown of Jewish support for RLPA nevertheless was "very disappointing," adding that it's "unfortunate" that the groups decided protecting religious practice is "not a high enough priority."

Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department and one of the drafters of RLPA, said he thought the coalition had struck a "reasonable balance" between religious liberty and civil rights concerns in the legislation.

He held out the possibility, though, that some of the concerns expressed by opponents could be addressed through changes in the legislation.

Indeed, some of the Jewish groups that left the coalition indicated they would be open to re-examining an altered bill. It remains to be seen, however, what impact the dissolution of the coalition will have on the bill's prospects for passage — and whether the Senate will even decide to take up the controversial measure. □

Attention turns to peace with Syria as Israeli leaders visit U.S., Germany

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Efforts to revive Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations are proving to be a central topic as Israeli leaders visit Europe and the United States this week.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Ehud Barak brought up the issue, calling on Syria to end bloodshed and pursue peace. His call came during a state ceremony for the 2,687 Israeli soldiers who fell in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

"To our Syrian neighbors led by President [Hafez] Assad, who also sustained many losses in the Yom Kippur War, we say this is the time for the peace of the brave.

"Enough of war, enough of bloodshed. We and our neighbors must understand that there will be no peace without security."

Later Tuesday, Barak traveled to Berlin, where he became the first foreign leader to visit there since the German capital was moved from Bonn earlier this year.

Barak also brought up the topic on Wednesday, when he traveled to Paris for talks with President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

Chirac, who has repeatedly sought an expanded role in the Middle East peace process, met with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa over the weekend.

While Barak is interested in European involvement in the peace process, especially with regard to economic assistance, he prefers that the United States have the lead mediating role, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Sharaa said no progress was made toward renewing talks with Israel during a meeting he had Wednesday in New York with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Sharaa added that Syria is waiting for Israel to signal its willingness to return all of the Golan Heights, including lands bordering the Sea of Galilee, before resuming the talks. Albright, who is trying to get the two sides back to the negotiating table, had no comment after meeting with Sharaa. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Court orders paintings returned

A New York state appeals court ruled Tuesday that two paintings by an Austrian artist must be returned to Vienna.

The ruling, which reverses an earlier court decision, was a defeat for the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, which was conducting a probe to determine whether the Nazis stole the paintings by Egon Schiele from two Jewish families.

Britain, Iran plan diplomatic visits

Britain and Iran agreed to exchange ministerial visits for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said after meeting at the United Nations with his Iranian counterpart, Kamal Kharrazi, that the Iranian diplomat would visit Britain before the end of the year and that he would visit Tehran next spring. "We have today marked a further significant step forward in our relations," Cook said.

Shoah council appointees named

President Clinton named David Berger, Lanny Brewer and Nan Rich to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

Berger is an attorney who has been involved in philanthropic activities and was appointed by the U.S. Supreme Court as a member of a committee that drafted the model for evidentiary rules in U.S. courts.

Brewer, the son of Holocaust refugees, formerly served in the Clinton administration as special counsel to the president and as assistant district attorney in Manhattan. Rich, who recently completed her term as national president of the National Council of Jewish Women, currently serves as vice chair of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Sakic trial enters final phase

Prosecutors in the trial of a Croatian concentration camp commander asked that the defendant receive the maximum sentence of 20 years.

Their request came Tuesday during closing arguments in the trial of Dinko Sakic, who is accused of crimes against humanity for his actions when he ran the Jasenovac camp in 1944. Sakic claims that a typhus epidemic and other natural causes caused the estimated tens of thousands of deaths at the camp.

Book club launched in Poland

Poland's Jewish monthly magazine, *Midrasz*, has launched a Jewish book club. "We started it up in June and by September we had well over 100 customers," said *Midrasz* editor Konstanty Gebert. The club offers a choice of more than 400 titles, including more than 150 in English.

Search for UJC president narrows to five candidates

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — "Newly redesigned social service and fund-raising organization that provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually for Jewish needs in North America and around the world seeks a visionary leader who can articulate its mission to a broad-based constituency and collaborate with a national board of directors and high-powered volunteer leaders.

"Commitment to Jewish life and experience with corporate mergers a must."

So might read the job description for president of the United Jewish Communities, the chief professional officer of the organization formed by the merger of the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal.

It's an opening that has taken over a year to fill, and officials close to the process say they expect to announce a new CEO by the end of October.

The UJC was launched in April, but a 25-member search committee began its work in August 1998, while the UJA-CJF union still existed as a partnership.

Now those closest to the search for a qualified president say they have five serious prospects for the job.

Jeffrey Solomon, a consultant to the UJC, and David Edell, the president of Development Resource Group, a New York-based headhunting firm, said in an interview last week that the search has covered a professional spectrum ranging from local federation offices to the halls of government, including professionals in higher education, health care and public advocacy.

The two men responsible for recruiting candidates say that despite speculation to the contrary, they have encountered a high level of interest in the position and have held intensive discussions with "more than 10" people. They would not name those individuals. Solomon said the search has "narrowed down" in what has become a "day-to-day dynamic situation."

Edell and Solomon said they hope to complete the search well before the UJC's mid-November General Assembly, when federation leaders from around the country will gather in Atlanta.

Solomon is laying bets that the process will be wrapped up before the end of October.

That deadline would leave little lag time in filling the position currently held by Stephen Solender, whose six-month stint as acting UJC president is scheduled to end Oct. 15. Solender continues to work part time in his permanent role as executive vice president of UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

Solender was appointed in April after the search committee did not come up with a candidate and found itself "uncertain about what direction to go," said Daniel Shapiro, the New York lawyer who, with Richard Pearlstone of Aspen, Colo., serves as its co-chairman.

Over the past five months, they have returned to the process Shapiro describes as "complicated and interesting and challenging."

Solomon said the search was boosted by the completion of the merger and the announcement this spring that Charles Bronfman, Seagram company executive, would be UJC's chairman of the board.

"One of the things a CEO in a non-profit needs to know is who's going to be the chairman of the board, who am I going to be working with?" said Solomon, a former chief operating officer at the New York federation who is now the president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

The first phase of the search for a chief professional officer had resulted most publicly with a request from Steven Nasatir, the president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, that his name be withdrawn from consideration for the post.

Another large-city federation executive in the running was Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

Other names churning in the rumor mill during the original search phase included Stuart Eizenstat, U.S. deputy treasury secretary, and Richard Joel, the president and international director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. □

Survey attaches numbers to anti-Semitism in Russia

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — A combustible mixture of anti-Semitic attitudes and despair characterizes a substantial segment of the Russian population, according to a new survey.

Some 44 percent of the 1,528 people in the survey, conducted for the Anti-Defamation League, agreed with at least six of 11 statements that express stereotypes about Jews.

A similar survey conducted by the ADL in 1998 showed that 12 percent of Americans harbored strong prejudice against Jews.

Only 7 percent of Russians believe that their country is headed in the right direction, creating what the survey, quoting a man from a 1998 focus group, calls an "age of survival" in Russia today.

The survey results provide quantitative evidence to the bleak portrait that has been painted anecdotally in Russia since last August, when the country's economy collapsed.

Several anti-Semitic bomb attacks and incidents have occurred during the past year, and last fall prominent Communist lawmakers made repeated, public anti-Semitic comments.

The ADL called the findings "extremely troubling and potentially dangerous, especially in a climate of political and economic turmoil, and as acts of political and popular anti-Semitism increase in the Russian Federation."

The survey "puts into black and white what many people have believed. Now we have the documentation," said Mark Levin, the executive director of the National Conference of Soviet Jewry, which entered into a partnership with the ADL and the Russian Jewish Congress earlier this year to combat anti-Semitism and promote democracy and tolerance.

"This should be a clarion call to focus" on the issues of anti-Semitism, human rights and democratization, Levin added.

In part, the survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with statements about Jews, including "Jews, more than others, are ready to use unscrupulous means to achieve their aims" and "Jews in Russia these days exercise too much power."

Other statements on this chart asked individuals to agree or disagree with statements such as "Too many banks in Russia are controlled by the Jews" and "Jews have many irritating traits."

The findings demonstrate the problems that led to the creation of the new partnership between Jewish organizations in the United States and Russia, said Levin.

The partnership is devising a strategy — including public service announcements, educational curricula and pressing political parties to add human rights to their platforms — to achieve its goals.

At the same time, however, a majority of respondents agreed with several positive statements about Jews, including "Most Jews are decent, honest people" and Jews contributed their share to the Soviet cause during World War II.

This finding is consistent with other surveys of prejudice — as the survey report notes, positive beliefs about a particular group often coexist with negative ones.

In other findings:

- 71 percent believe the last year or two have been the hardest of their lives.
- In the United States, anti-Semitic attitudes are most prevalent

among people older than 65 and those without higher education; in Russia, anti-Semitic attitudes are spread more evenly throughout the population. Women under 45 and women with higher education are the least likely to hold anti-Semitic beliefs.

- Respondents exhibited a high level of anger toward the United States. Eighty-seven percent agreed that the "United States is taking advantage of the economic difficulties Russia is experiencing to strengthen its influence in the world"; and only about 10 percent think President Clinton is a real friend of Russia.

- In general, Russian politicians are not viewed favorably. Only 4 percent of respondents said they like Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov had the highest favorability ratings — at 72 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

The Boston-based Marttila Communications group and a Moscow-based opinion research firm ran the survey, which was conducted in face-to-face interviews in Russian. The survey, conducted in May and June, has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. □

Pope tells Israeli, Palestinian kids cooperation is a 'moral imperative'

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Pope John Paul II this week urged Israeli and Palestinian youth to maintain the momentum of the Middle East peace process and reiterated his determination to visit the Holy Land to mark the Christian millennium.

The 79-year-old pontiff on Wednesday delivered what the Vatican called a written "message of peace" to three teen-agers from the Israel-based Peres Center for Peace, whom he met after his weekly general audience.

They included a 15-year-old Christian boy, a 17-year-old Jewish boy and a 15-year-old Muslim girl.

"You young people, and all those whom you represent, must be the first to realize the hopes of your peoples and of the world at large," said the pope.

"The decisions you make concerning yourselves and your vocation in society will decide the prospects for peace, both today and tomorrow.

"At the threshold of the new millennium, you must come to see more clearly that the future of peace, and therefore the future of all humanity, depends on the fundamental choices your generation will make," he said.

"It is a moral imperative that you help to construct a new society, to build a new civilization, based ever more solidly on mutual respect, brotherhood and the spirit of cooperation."

The pope noted the hopes attached to the Wye II accord signed by the Palestinians and Israel on Sept. 4. People everywhere, he said, have "trust and expectation" that it "will grow ever stronger and lead to an effective and lasting peace."

In his message, the pope reiterated his plans to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land this coming year, but did not mention specific timing or places.

"You know that, if God wills, I plan to go to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage tracing the stages of the history of salvation. God willing, therefore, we shall have the chance to meet again on your own soil," he said. □