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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hope rises for Iran 13

The chief of Iran's Revolutionary Court said some of the 13 Iranian Jews arrested in March on charges of espionage might be freed in order to improve Iran's international standing.

But Gholamhossein Rahbarpour distanced himself from such a decision, saying that it would be made by Iran's Supreme National Security Council, according to Iranian newspapers. "This is a significant statement from an important personality," the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said. "We hope that this will be reflected in action not for some of the 13, but for all," Malcolm Hoenlein said.

U.S. criticizes Arafat remark

The U.S. State Department described as "deeply troubling" a statement Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat made on Saudi television that Israel has dumped environmentally hazardous materials in Arab areas. "The continued repetition of baseless charges" that are "outrageous and inflammatory has no place" in the "discourse between Israelis and Palestinians," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

Jordanian arrested at embassy

A man carrying a pistol was overcome and arrested by Jordanian guards outside the Israeli Embassy in Amman.

Jordanian officials later described the man as deranged, adding that he had fired blanks from a fake gun. Israeli officials were dispatched from Jerusalem to Amman to get a briefing on the situation.

Tuesday's incident took place two days after Jordan expelled four Hamas leaders, but it is not clear if the events are related.

Rabbis' remarks condemned

Israeli Cabinet ministers and legislators from across the political spectrum condemned remarks by rabbis from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party against immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported that during a demonstration against the sale of pork in Beit Shemesh, outside Jerusalem, Rabbi David Benizri, brother of Israel's health minister, accused Russian immigrants of bringing ailments and abomination to the city.

REDEFINING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Today's Jewish renaissance creates a canvas for the future

By Lisa Hostein

ATLANTA (JTA) — If Michelangelo's Renaissance meant sculpting Moses from a piece of marble, just what does an American Jewish renaissance hope to create?

Like the great Italian artists who reached back to classical influences to transform art and culture, American Jewry is reaching back to Jewish sources to create a new kind of contemporary Jew — one steeped in Jewish learning and tradition, a Jew excited about being Jewish out of choice, not necessity.

It's a tall order in these times of growing assimilation; but it is one optimists and pessimists of the American Jewish scene believe will be necessary for American Jewry not only to survive, but to thrive.

Although some have been preaching the need for a Jewishly literate American Jewry for years, the organized community, propelled by the grass roots, is now taking up the cause.

The United Jewish Communities, the new federation-driven national fund-raising and social service organization officially launched last week in Atlanta, has designated Jewish Renaissance and Renewal as one of its four main pillars, or areas of focus.

Indeed, a task force charged with recommending a course of action suggested as its guiding vision: to provide a bold and vigorous leadership for building a Jewish community permeated by Torah, chesed (lovingkindness) and tzedek (justice or righteousness).

"We've come a long way, at least rhetorically," Jonathan Woocher, executive vice president of the Jewish Education Service of North America, said last week at the opening Renaissance forum at the UJC's General Assembly.

"Whereas in the past we were worrying about Jewish continuity, now the focus is on Jewish renaissance," he said to hundreds of G.A. delegates who were representing federations throughout North America.

The buzzword has changed, and so, it seems, has the emphasis.

The Renaissance forum drew the largest attendance of any of the four focus sessions in Atlanta — the others being Campaign/Finance Resource Development, Human Services and Social Policy, and Israel and Overseas — confirming that finding meaningful answers to the question "Why be Jewish today?" is a top priority for those in the trenches.

No longer buoyed by the twin "safety nets" of anti-Semitism and Israel that have long kept Jews in the fold, "the challenge is to build a Judaism where people want to be Jews," Rabbi Donniel Hartman of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem told the G.A.'s opening session.

Most Jewish children are safe today as they sleep, Hartman said.

"Our question now is what is going to be the quality of the Jewish life they are exposed to when they wake up?"

For Lee Meyerhoff Hendler, creating a quality Jewish life is not just for the children.

"If Judaism remains a pediatric affair," she said, the Jewish community will soon be dead.

Meyerhoff Hendler, a philanthropist who recounted her own spiritual journey in the book "The Year Mom Got Religion," believes the key question is not, as has often been asked when talking about the Jewish future, "Will our grandchildren be Jewish?"

MIDEAST FOCUS

Settlers abandon hilltop

Jewish settlers voluntarily abandoned a West Bank enclave they staked out overnight. Tuesday's move came after Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh warned they could be evicted forcibly.

The settlers had set up tents on a hilltop near the settlement of Tekoa, saying the site was situated within the settlement's master plan. Last month Prime Minister Ehud Barak reached a deal with settler leaders to voluntarily dismantle 12 outposts deemed illegal by the government.

Cornerstone laid for mosque

Christian holy sites in Israel remained closed a second day to protest a cornerstone-laying ceremony that took place Tuesday for a mosque near the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

A statement posted at the entrances to the sites said the move was in response to Israel's decision to allow construction of the mosque near the shrine. Church leaders said further protests may take place if the matter is not resolved soon. The Vatican is accusing Israel of fomenting religious divisions by allowing the mosque to be built.

Palestinians report on weapons

The Palestinian Authority presented Israel with a report on the confiscation by its security forces of dozens of illegal weapons and explosives.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Israel views the step as the first Palestinian fulfillment of obligations under previously signed agreements, but considers it only a small one.

Newspaper publisher arrested

Israeli police arrested a newspaper publisher who has been under investigation for allegedly plotting to have two rival publishers and a detective killed. The arrest of Ofer Nimrodi, publisher of Ma'ariv, came after police searched his home, Israel Radio reported.



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but rather, "Will we be Jewish?" The Jewish renaissance already has its early artists.

Jews are flocking in unprecedented numbers to day schools, synagogue-based adult education programs, online learning sessions, Jewish camps and Hillel university programs.

"Renaissance and renewal happens on the ground, person by person, institution by institution, community by community," said Beryl Geber of Los Angeles, who has been named to chair the UJC's Renaissance pillar.

Barry Shrage, president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston and a driving force behind the national emphasis on Jewish renaissance, cited as an example a successful Boston-area adult education program that requires a two-year commitment of weekly Jewish learning costing individuals \$500 a year.

He said that every synagogue, every Jewish community center, every day school, could have a similar program given the needed resources and staff.

"Most of what we have to do will not require a huge amount of additional experimentation; we already know exactly what we have to do," Shrage said. "All we have to do is do it."

"People are hungry" for Jewish education, he said. "This is the moment when we can transform the consciousness of the American Jewish community. This is the moment when the Zeitgeist is about to change."

Underlying all these programs is the increasing emphasis on learning and religion among American Jews.

There appears to be a consensus, as Meyerhoff Hendler put it, that "civil Judaism" — an emphasis on fighting anti-Semitism, lobbying for Soviet Jewry and protecting Israel — "has been a failure in terms of transmitting the passion to be Jewish from one generation to the next."

People "have to know something in order to transmit it," Meyerhoff Hendler said, adding: "You cannot transmit feelings."

"Torah is the epicenter of our Jewish experience," she said. "We cannot make Jews, we cannot have a true Jewish community if we choose to ignore Torah."

Indeed, at the same forum, Woocher wondered whether "renaissance" is a code word for Judaism, because people are afraid to call it what it is.

"Every act of Jewish commitment today is an act of faith," said Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, president of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The goal is to help every Jew "see himself or herself as part of the Jewish story, which is Torah in its broadest and best sense."

"The essence must be religious," he said, but not in a narrow way.

"With many gateways in to being Jewish," he said, "the story is open to all of us."

Translating into action the need for Jewish education — be it adult education, day schools, Jewish camps or Israel experiences — is part of what the UJC hopes to address.

Combining the energies of the federation, the religious movements and national organizations, the Renaissance pillar wants to "provide motivation" and enable communities "to do for themselves," Geber said. In addition to collaborating with the local communities, the UJC wants to act as a matchmaker between those communities that are flourishing and those that need help with ideas and resources, she said.

Many of the federation representatives gathered in Atlanta agreed with the emphasis on Jewish renewal, but were uncertain how it would translate to their community.

"Renaissance is a huge issue in my community," Michael Wise, the executive director of the Akron Jewish Community Federation, said, noting that his own community had already restructured into a single operating entity and designated Jewish education as one of four focus areas.

"We're all just trying to figure out how what happens nationally translates into the local," Wise said, quoting the axiom, "All politics is local; the question is, how will it affect my community?"

Paula Glazier, who serves on the Detroit area's agency for Jewish education, also wasn't certain how what was happening in Atlanta would affect her community.

But, she said, summing up the focus here: "I believe the way to breed more Jews is through Judaism." □

JEWISH WORLD

Vatican archives panel named

The Vatican and an international committee of Jewish leaders announced the composition of a six-member group of Jewish and Catholic scholars who will review published Vatican archives relating to World War II.

The panel plans to help clarify the role of the Roman Catholic Church and of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust. Tuesday's announcement was made by Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations. The two groups agreed to form the team in October.

Bank Leumi to list accounts

Israel's Bank Leumi plans to publish a list of dormant accounts to help Holocaust-era victims submit claims. The bank will publish a list of "several thousand" accounts from the bank's founding in 1903 through 1955, a bank spokeswoman said Monday.

The move came after a class-action lawsuit was filed against the bank charging that it refused to provide information to heirs of Eastern European Jews who transferred funds to banks in Palestine on the eve of World War II.

Survivor to get mother's diaries

A Holocaust survivor won a court case to get his mother's concentration camp diaries from a scholar who was translating them.

Michael Simon, who was born at Theresienstadt in 1943, asked last year for the return of the diaries, but the translator refused, saying she had a right to finish and publish her work. Simon's mother, Minni, secretly documented her life at the camp until it was liberated in 1945.

Police confiscate 'Protocols'

Hungarian police confiscated copies of a century-old anti-Semitic book from bookstores in three Hungarian towns. Jewish organizations have complained about the recent publication and sale of three editions of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

Taiwan firm sorry for Hitler ad

A Taiwanese company apologized for featuring a cartoon of a smiling Hitler in ads to sell German-made electric space heaters and said they would be removed within days.

The announcement came Tuesday after Israeli and German trade officials in the capital of Taipei said they were appalled by the ads, which show Hitler in a brown uniform and black jackboots, his arm raised in a stiff-armed salute. Above him is a space heater and the slogan, "Declare War on the Cold Front."

GOP Jews pounce on first lady's Mideast troubles with an attack ad

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The political fallout from Hillary Rodham Clinton's perceived misstep in Ramallah is not going away.

Images of the first lady sitting silently while Suha Arafat, the wife of the Palestinian Authority president, accused Israel of poisoning Palestinians has been playing on television screens in New York and Washington this week — thanks to Jewish Republicans.

One day later, Clinton issued her criticism of Arafat's remarks.

"Everyone who supports this effort toward resolving the outstanding issues among the parties should refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and from baseless accusations," said Clinton, who also suggested that she did not respond immediately to Arafat's comments because they were not as harsh in the English translation she had heard.

Still, that incident has also led to a Jewish Democratic state senator's decision to endorse Clinton's likely opponent, Rudolph Giuliani, in their still-unofficial race for the U.S. Senate seat from New York.

Sen. Carl Kruger of Brooklyn threw his support behind the New York City mayor Tuesday at a City Hall news conference.

Recent polls have shown that Clinton is not faring as well with Jewish voters as most Democratic candidates normally do. A poll by the Quinnipiac College Polling Institute showed Clinton garnering 46 percent of the Jewish vote with Giuliani receiving 43 percent, a statistical dead heat.

"Jewish voters are split, troubling news for any Democratic candidate," said Maurice Carroll, director of the institute.

The commercial, paid for by the Republican Jewish Coalition, criticizes Clinton for not immediately refuting charges leveled by Arafat that Israeli forces used poisonous gas against Palestinians, leading to an increase in cancer.

Arafat also claimed during the Nov. 11 event, with Clinton sitting at her side, that Israel had contaminated 80 percent of Palestinian water sources with "chemical materials."

The ad, with ominous music in the background, shows a stone-faced Clinton sitting beside Arafat as she spoke and then shows Clinton and Arafat embracing at the end of Arafat's speech.

A narrator says: "With Hillary Clinton at her side, Suha Arafat made the false and disgraceful claim that Israel was poisoning Palestinian women and children with toxic gases. Instead of reacting with outrage, Hillary Clinton sat by silently."

"When Arafat was finished, Hillary gave her a hug and a kiss. It's sad. While Israel sacrifices for peace — Arafat spreads hatred and lies — and Hillary embraces her. Tell Hillary Clinton — stand up for Israel — stand up for truth."

Howard Wolfson, the spokesman for Clinton's exploratory committee, criticized the ad and suggested that Giuliani's camp was behind it.

Giuliani, who like Clinton has yet to announce his candidacy, has criticized the first lady over the Arafat incident. "I certainly wouldn't have embraced the person that said it — hugged them and kissed them."

Matthew Brooks, the executive director of the RJC, said the ad was produced by the group and had nothing to do with Giuliani's possible Senate campaign. Brooks said his group is spending \$50,000 to run the ads because of its concern over Clinton's failure to quickly respond to Arafat's charges.

This is the first time the group has paid for such television ads.

In response to the ad, Jewish Democrats are seizing on positive comments about Clinton and her trip made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Barak, speaking Sunday to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organization in New York, said Clinton's trip was "highly successful" and "contributed to the peace process in spite of this incident."

He also said Israel "will always wish to have such friends as the Clintons in the White House." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak emphasizes pragmatism in discussions with American Jews*By Howard Lovy*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The British airport worker who slammed his truck into a plane making a refueling stop could not have realized that he was punctuating a point for the aircraft's important passenger.

Ehud Barak finally made it to the United States later than he had planned, with what he called a "small human error" preventing him from personally addressing the thousands of American Jewish communal leaders waiting to greet him in Atlanta.

A day later, speaking in New York to a wildly supportive crowd at an Israel Policy Forum dinner, the commando-turned-politician found a way to use this concept of unpredictable human failings to slip into his political message: If the peace process fails, it will be due to human error, and its success will not come through heavenly intervention.

"I cannot look to the heavens for miracles, and I do not believe in waiting for divine solutions," Barak told the IPF gathering, a theme he repeated the next day to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "This must be resolved, here and now, by human beings."

Had it come from the leader of any other nation, this theme of humans seizing the moment would seem almost trite. But Israel was founded, in part, on biblical claims, and its history is peppered with the language of miracles.

Barak is not a post-Zionist out to "debunk the myths" of Israel's miraculous survival, but he is attempting to take the image of Israel among North American Jews out of the realm of the mythic and place it firmly in modern-day political reality.

Barak told the Conference of Presidents that he has "no illusions" regarding the "tough neighborhood" in which Israel lives.

But, he said, unlike Israel's supporters and critics in Europe and America, he's not flying in a "balloon" and gazing below at Israel the symbol, the idea or the fulfillment of a biblical promise.

Rather, he said, "we have our feet on the ground."

This pragmatism emerged in many of the answers Barak gave to those on both the right and the left at the Conference of Presidents forum and in his concrete proposals on what is possible for human beings to accomplish now, as opposed to higher-minded ideals toward which Israelis and Palestinians can later aspire.

His message to the left: Coexistence with Palestinians, while a wonderful ideal, is not possible in the real world as it exists today. That's why he is advocating "good fences for good neighbors" and complete separation between Israel and any future Palestinian state. His message to the right: While he's bothered by anti-Israeli rhetoric — from Yasser Arafat's wife on down — he will not allow it to paralyze the peace process.

He said that, unlike his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, he will not first insist that his neighbors become "Jeffersonian democracies" before Israel can make peace with them.

It was a theme he echoed in a taped video presentation to Jewish delegates in Atlanta.

"Today to be pro-Israel is to be pro-peace," he said via satellite after the mishap in England made him miss his planned appearance

at the General Assembly of the United Jewish Committees.

Barak said he realizes that a final-status agreement on a piece of paper will not make peace in the hearts of individuals.

But first, he said, there must be peace, politically and legally, before Palestinians and Israelis can start on the journey toward true peace in their attitudes and rhetoric. So, what are the first steps along this journey? Barak mentioned a few to the Israel Policy Forum and the Conference of Presidents:

- A "joint code of conduct" should be drawn up so that although negotiators do not necessarily need to say nice things about one another, they will at least agree to keep the rhetoric civil;

- In addition to a physical fence separating Israelis and Palestinians, there will be an economic one as well. "Separate economies for separate peoples," complete with a separate Palestinian currency. A complete divorce would, he said, end any talk of the Palestinians attempting a "phased way to destroy Israel."

Even with separation, however, Barak said he envisions "free-trade agreements with the Palestinians and broad economic cooperation, the sharing of know-how and raw materials and some Palestinians working in Israel." Barak indicated that peace not only involves Israel, the Palestinians and other Arab neighbors. It also must come among Jews themselves — a theme that found a receptive audience in the United States.

With Israel no longer worried about its continuing existence, it can be "liberated to pursue a wide-ranging agenda of human and economic rights, environmental protection and the difficult questions of religion and state."

The prime minister pledged to continue a move toward a free market economy and said he will encourage private high-tech entrepreneurship. But he also said that while in the United States the label of "tax and spend" can mean political death, in Israel the government is expected to shoulder more burdens on behalf of the "weaker members of society."

To illustrate his commitment to a free market, Barak ended his U.S. visit Monday by opening the NASDAQ exchange, where the majority of Israeli stocks listed on Wall Street are traded. At a luncheon later in the day for executives of companies traded on the exchange, Barak spoke of the investment opportunities Israeli firms offer. Barak also sees a strong government role in making sure that immigrants from the former Soviet Union are treated fairly when it comes to deciding their religious status. Barak said he is a "great believer in aliyah" and wishes Israel could attract another million immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

In response to concerns about whether the new immigrants are Jewish, he only half-jokingly attempted to answer the age-old question of "Who is a Jew?"

"Whoever is meshuganah enough to want to become a Jew" should be allowed to become one.

Barak spoke in mostly level tones and had detailed answers to most questions put to him. When speaking of topics dear to him, he turned animated and occasionally pounded the lectern. But he frequently returned to the theme of Israel not as a myth, not a miracle, but a community of human beings who, combined with the power and influence of American Jewry, can make the Middle East a safer place.

"At the end of the day," Barak said, "we will still be living side by side with the Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea."

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