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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel, Vatican trade barbs

Israel criticized a Vatican statement which said that allowing construction of a mosque near the main Christian shrine in Nazareth was intended to aggravate tensions between Muslims and Christians.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Israel said the criticism "recalls the time-honored convention of accusing the wrong party." The exchanges reflect the most serious strains between Israel and the Vatican since the two established diplomatic relations in 1994.

Clinton wanted to avoid 'incident'

Hillary Rodham Clinton appeared to change her defense against accusations that she sat silently by while Suha Arafat accused Israel of using poisonous gas against Palestinians.

The first lady said Tuesday, when she announced her intention to run for a U.S. Senate seat from New York, that she did not immediately respond because she did not want to cause an "international incident." Clinton previously suggested that she did not respond immediately because the comments were not as harsh in the English translation she had heard.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority distanced itself from the accusations Arafat made against Israel. The accusations "represent her own point of view, and she is not a member of the Palestinian Authority," the self-rule government said.

Vanunu trial records released

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot published previously secret documents from the trial of convicted nuclear spy Mordechai Vanunu. In the court transcripts, Vanunu said he had exposed the secrets of Israel's nuclear program to force the government to bring the program under supervision.

Shimon Peres, the then-prime minister who ordered that Vanunu be arrested abroad in 1986, said Wednesday he is concerned that publication of the court documents would lead to new international pressure on Israel to disclose its nuclear capability.

REMINDER: Because of the Thanksgiving holiday in the U.S., the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Nov. 26.

REDEFINING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Federations grapple with way to fund overseas Jewish needs

By Julia Goldman

ATLANTA (JTA) — "A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" was Winston Churchill's famous description of the Soviet Union in 1939.

That description might fit the new process by which the American Jewish community will allocate funds for programs and services in the former Soviet Union, Israel and other overseas locales.

A recent survey of lay and professional officers of 32 of the nearly 200 federations that make up the United Jewish Communities revealed that Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution, or ONAD, as the process is known, is poorly understood.

"There is a lot of anxiety about ONAD," Dr. Steve Serbin, the president of the Jewish federation in Columbia, S.C., told a meeting of federation presidents and executives last week during the UJC's inaugural General Assembly in Atlanta.

Who sits on the 25-member ONAD committee, Serbin wanted to know. What overseas agencies are represented? And what is ONAD's role in the overall structure of the UJC?

The answers to Serbin's questions are significant because the UJC — created this year through the merger of the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal — was created in large part to give federations greater control over the distribution of funds raised through federations for Jewish needs worldwide.

Of the \$790 million raised by the system in 1999, nearly \$300 million was allocated for overseas needs, such as the rescue of Jews in distress, providing social services for the elderly in places such as Ukraine and fostering Jewish education worldwide.

This amount reflects the continuation of a trend among federations to allocate fewer dollars overseas in favor of directing more to local needs, such as Jewish education.

Under the old system, federations determined individually what percentage of the funds they raised would go to overseas needs. One of the concerns about the new system is the extent to which it will allow individual federations to continue making those decisions. There is not yet a consensus among the UJC leadership on how or whether to enforce support for core needs, whether by regulations or by moral suasion.

That issue is one of many that the UJC system will tackle next spring as it decides what rights and responsibilities federations will have.

Interviews conducted by McKinsey & Company, a management consulting firm, among the lay and professional officers of 32 federations revealed that "the largest group felt the process needs to remain voluntary," a McKinsey representative said during a meeting in Atlanta.

A sizeable though smaller group felt that federations, as the majority shareholders in the UJC, now have an opportunity to step up their communal support for core needs.

One of the ONAD committee's main tasks is to determine which overseas needs should be funded by all federations in the UJC system and which should be funded on an elective basis. The ONAD process is meant for the first time to bring the federations to the same table with the agencies that provide services overseas, primarily the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. It is also intended to open up the system to other agencies in the field.

This represents a significant change from the past, when the Jewish Agency and the JDC decided themselves how to divvy up the funds for overseas needs.

"The decisions are made by the federations," said Alan Jaffe, the ONAD committee

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak optimistic on withdrawal

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he expected a dispute with the Palestinian Authority over an Israeli withdrawal from an additional 5 percent of the West Bank would be resolved within days.

Speaking in London after meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Barak added that another withdrawal, slated for January, would take place "exactly on time."

Iran, Fatah linked to bombing

Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement provided the explosives used in the 1983 truck bombing that killed 241 U.S. Marines in Beirut, according to a report in Newsweek. Citing a U.S. National Security Agency phone tap, an article in a recent issue also linked Iranian officials to the bombing.

Court orders Iraqis' release

Israel's High Court of Justice ordered the release of six Iraqi nationals who have been jailed without trial for more than six years. The court rejected the argument of security forces that at least three of the Iraqis were sent to Israel to spy on the Jewish state.

Arab workers end Gaza boycott

Palestinian workers ended their three-day boycott and returned to their jobs in Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. Many of the workers said they could not afford to continue the boycott, which began as a protest against using Arab labor to help expand Jewish settlements.

Israeli executives visit Senegal

An Israeli delegation of telecommunications executives is visiting Senegal, which has not had diplomatic relations with Israel for 15 years. The communications minister of the African nation said Tuesday his country "hopes to advance diplomatic relations" with the Jewish state.



Daily News Bulletin

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chairman and a former president of the UJA-Federation of New York.

If federations decide that certain needs are priorities, the hope is that they will be more invested in supporting them and in getting local donors to follow suit. In addition to the chairman, the 25-member ONAD committee is made up of 18 representatives of different size federations and three representatives apiece from JAFI and the JDC.

But UJC President Stephen Solender said communication is essential to the success of the ONAD process. "It's not going to work if 18 federations reach consensus, and that's the end of it," he said, adding that they have to bring along the rest of the federations.

At the G.A., the ONAD committee held its third meeting, this time to consult with top-level representatives of the Jewish Agency and the JDC to begin to determine what the core needs should be. Jaffe said the committee is aiming to complete its assessment of needs and budget allocations for specific programs by June 30.

In addition to rescue and aliyah, the overseas needs being discussed by the committee include promoting Jewish peoplehood, unity and diversity; and aiding populations in Israel with special needs to create a "caring" society, Jaffe said.

As an example, Jaffe said the ONAD committee might determine that a core need is "Jewish peoplehood," and could then allocate funds for Partnership 2000 — a Jewish Agency program that creates economic partnerships and professional and other people-to-people links between the Diaspora and Israeli communities — as a program under that core-need umbrella. Before the ONAD system was devised, the JDC and the United Israel Appeal, acting as a conduit for funds going to Israel via the Jewish Agency, had determined how to spend funds raised by the UJA.

With the call by federations for one North American fund-raising and social service organization, the two groups agreed to relinquish ownership of the UJA in order to allow the fund-raising organization to merge with CJF to form a single North American system. The UJA joined the union for at least five years as a subsidiary organization.

"There was a sense of a disconnect between the overseas service providers" — the JDC and the Jewish Agency — "and the system," Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and a member of the ONAD committee, said at the G.A. "The providers did not feel that the system understood overseas needs and vice versa." Bringing the two groups together, Aronson said, will mean "we have a more productive operation moving forward." Officials of the Jewish Agency and the JDC expressed optimism that the federations would come through.

The chairman of the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors, Alex Grass of Harrisburg, Pa., said he is confident that the work of the agency, which is responsible primarily for immigration and resettlement of Jews in Israel, but is also involved in Jewish education, is "so essential that we will continue to receive support, and perhaps even enhance it."

After the ONAD meeting in Atlanta, Michael Schneider, the executive vice president of the JDC, which provides rescue and relief and promotes Jewish renewal around the world, said it was "a promising start."

He said the JDC board is resolved to give the process "every chance of success" and that he is "pretty optimistic for all overseas needs."

The McKinsey study showed that the ONAD process and progress have not been communicated well enough to federations. The face-to-face meetings, however, promise to help raise consciousness in the communities about the work of overseas agencies.

Solender said the ONAD meeting at the G.A. was the first time many federation representatives had ever met directly with representatives of the agencies.

"The hardest thing we have to do is describe the Jewish Agency and JDC to the folks at home," Priscilla Kostiner, the president of the Jewish Federation of Portland.

She said there is still some reason for the agencies to be nervous about the future of their relationship with the UJC.

"It's a change and we really don't know what's going to be," or where the Jewish Agency and JDC will "stand in line" with other agencies, she said.

Jaffe is slightly more positive about the federations supporting a system in which they feel their concerns are being adequately represented, a concept known in the UJC system as "buy-in."

"It's likely, but there's no guarantee," he said.

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JEWISH WORLD

Israeli girl gets new lung

A 10-year-old Israeli girl is recovering after receiving lung transplants from her mother and a British man who had read of her plight in a London Jewish newspaper. Russian-born Lisa Ostrovsky, who suffers from cystic fibrosis, was in critical but stable condition at Children's Hospital in St. Louis.

Ostrovsky underwent the six-hour-long transplant on Tuesday after lung lobes were donated by her mother, Valentina Kurdumov, and Ron Johnson, a 48-year-old British janitor.

Papon stripped of honor

France stripped a convicted Nazi collaborator of his Legion of Honor award.

Maurice Papon, now serving a 10-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity, was given the honor when he was Paris police chief in 1962.

AJC Congress blasts delivery firm

The American Jewish Congress called on a leading package delivery firm to cease its "discriminatory practice" of not serving Jewish settlements in the West Bank while delivering to Palestinian communities in the same area.

In a letter to Airborne Express, AJCongress Executive Director Phil Baum reacted to a complaint from the New York-based Best of Israel Co., which was refused delivery of a package to the West Bank community of Kfar Adumim, a suburb of Jerusalem.

Masons restore Berlin cemetery

A group of German masons completed restoration work on 103 Jewish gravestones desecrated in Europe's largest Jewish cemetery.

The Berlin Jewish community said it would show its appreciation to the masons, who did the repair work for free, by holding a dinner in their honor.

Judge disqualifies Jewish official

A Canadian judge disqualified a Canadian Jewish Congress official from appearing as an expert witness at the trial of seven people charged with promoting hatred.

The judge explained this week that he rejected Bernie Farber's testimony out of concern that he might be biased. The seven were charged with wilfully promoting hatred in 1997 toward a group of Czech Gypsies. Farber said at the time he felt the incident was "a clear-cut case of hate-mongering."

Israelis gobble up turkey

Israelis consume more turkey meat than anyone else, according to the U.S. National Turkey Institute. The average Israeli eats 27.8 pounds of turkey each year, the institute says.

Iranian statement hints at possible deal for Jews

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — The chief of Iran's Revolutionary Court has reportedly said that some of the 13 Iranian Jews arrested for espionage might be freed if it is in Iran's national interests.

Gholamhossein Rahbarpour said such a decision would be made by Iran's Supreme National Security Council and would have "nothing to do with the court," according to a news report.

Jewish advocates for the Iranian Jews expressed cautious optimism over the statements, saying this is the first time an Iranian authority has suggested that the issue has political implications.

In recent months, Iran has come under pressure from Western governments and human rights groups that have repeatedly raised the fate of the 13 Jews in statements and meetings with Iranian officials.

Many observers believe that the arrests and accusations are part of a power struggle between conservative hard-liners and President Mohammad Khatami, who has made overtures to the West. The Jews being held in the Shiraz jail are religious and community leaders and include one 16-year-old boy. Arrested in March, they are being detained for spying for Israel.

Espionage is punishable by execution in Iran.

Both Israel and the United States have vehemently denied the charges.

The Reuters report Tuesday, quoting Iranian newspapers, said that Rahbarpour compared the current arrests with the Iranian hostage crisis, during which American diplomats were held for 444 days in the U.S. Embassy and released in January 1981.

The Jews "are not more important than the American spies," who were detained and then released, Rahbarpour reportedly said.

"Of course, it is possible the same thing will happen for these Jews, or the situation could change and their conditions may turn out worse than the American spies," he is quoted as saying.

Still American Jewish advocates for the prisoners discern in the statement a flicker of hope.

"To the extent that it indicates that the judiciary would be flexible in looking at the issue, we welcome it," said Sam Kermanian, secretary-general of the American Iranian Jewish Federation in Los Angeles.

This is the first time, Kermanian said, that the arrests have been raised publicly not only as a judicial issue, but one with political implications.

Until now, Iranian officials have contended that the arrests are an internal matter. Officials have denied any religious motivation for the arrests, saying that Muslims were arrested together with the Jews. Earlier this year, Rahbarpour reportedly said the court had strong evidence against the accused.

So far, the 13 have not been formally charged, and no trial has been announced, but American Jewish advocates, while hoping for their release, are also working on various levels to try to ensure that the prisoners receive a fair trial.

"This is a significant statement from an important personality," the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said of the reports out of Tehran. "We hope that this will be reflected in action not for some of the 13, but for all," Malcolm Hoenlein said. □

Argentina honors Schindler's widow

NEW YORK (JTA) — Argentina named the widow of Oskar Schindler a "distinguished citizen" for her role in saving the lives of 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust.

In 1949, Emilie Schindler, now 92, and her husband moved to Argentina, a country that also provided refuge for many Nazis. Leaders of Argentina's 300,000-strong Jewish community attended the Nov. 18 ceremony. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Jewish groups did not get all they wanted in Congress***By Michael Shapiro*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — While Jewish groups got few of the key things they were lobbying for during the first session of the 106th Congress, activists say much of the groundwork has been laid for next year.

"The legislative highway is littered with more failed legislation than successes," said Matthew Dorf, director of governmental and public affairs at the American Jewish Congress. Some of the issues pushed by activists this session deal with hate crimes, religious liberty and gun control.

Jewish groups did win a major battle on one of their top priorities: securing \$1.8 billion in aid to fund the Wye agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee led a lobbying blitz to ensure that the funds were included in the \$385 billion budget approved by the House and Senate late last week.

But on their other top priorities, Jewish groups were not as successful. Tougher hate crimes legislation was dropped during the final days of negotiations over the budget bill.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act would have given federal prosecutors new authority to prosecute hate crimes against women, the disabled, and gays and lesbians. It would have also made it easier for the federal government to investigate and prosecute hate crimes. President Clinton vetoed an earlier piece of legislation because Republican leaders took the hate crimes provisions out of the bill. Activists then lobbied to have the provisions included in the final catch-all spending bill.

However, Republican leaders opposed the measure because they say it would designate special classes of citizens, particularly gays and lesbians, who are already protected under existing state laws against violence.

Michael Lieberman, the Anti-Defamation League's Washington counsel, said his group will push for the measure again when Congress comes back in January.

Legislation to allow people to practice their religion free from government intrusion, which was initially backed by every major Jewish organization, also became stuck.

While the proposal, known as the Religious Liberty Protection Act easily passed the House, it was never considered by the Senate. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) had announced last month that he put the legislation on a "short list" of bills for the Senate to consider during the closing weeks of the session, but it was never brought to the floor for a vote.

Some Democratic lawmakers and some Jewish groups, which pulled their support for the bill in its current form, expressed concerns that the legislation could be used to justify violations of state and local anti-discrimination laws.

Activists who are backing the legislation said language is being worked on to allay those concerns and hope the Senate will consider the bill next year.

Some activists said this session was marked by Jewish groups trying to block pieces of legislation from becoming law in a Congress that is controlled by conservatives while most of the Jewish groups often push more liberal agendas.

"We're in a holding pattern," said Lieberman, adding that a number of groups spent the session trying to "prevent rollbacks" in areas such as church-state separation, including voucher plans that would allow students who are victims of violence at their schools to receive money to go to private or parochial schools.

Legislation introduced by House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas) was defeated, but a similar provision was included in a bankruptcy bill in the Senate that is expected to be finished next year.

Another church-state issue that will be revisited next year is charitable choice. The provision, first introduced as part of the welfare reform bill in 1996, allows federal money to go to religious institutions to provide welfare services.

During this past session, the provision was attached to a number of social service bills, including a juvenile justice bill and legislation promoting better fatherhood in low-income families. The bills are still being considered.

Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) also introduced a bill that would incorporate the provision in all legislation dealing with social services. While many Jewish groups are opposed to the provision, the Orthodox Union has backed it and will back Ashcroft's bill next session, said Nathan Diamant, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs.

Following are some of the other pieces of legislation that passed.

- President Clinton signed into law a bill directing the State Department to investigate the cases of three Israeli soldiers missing since 1982. The legislation signed directs the State Department to raise the issue of the missing soldiers, including Zachary Baumel, a U.S. citizen, with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.

- The U.S. commission investigating the fate of Holocaust-era assets that came under the control of the United States was given more time and money to complete its work. Congress passed legislation last week giving the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States another year to finish.

- A little more than \$600 million for senior housing development was attached to the final budget bill, although it was \$50 million less than last year, according to Mark Olshan, director of senior housing and services for B'nai B'rith.

Following are other pieces of legislation that were introduced and will most likely be worked on again next session.

- The Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which has been introduced in the last four Congresses, would require a private employer to "reasonably accommodate" the religious needs of an employee unless doing so would impose "undue hardship" on the employer. The bill was introduced in the Senate. Diamant said he will spend the recess looking for more supporters in the Senate and for lawmakers to introduce the bill in the House.

- The Iran Non-Proliferation Act unanimously passed the House but has yet to be acted in the Senate. The legislation, which is being pushed by AIPAC, is aimed at Russian entities providing assistance to Iran's weapons programs and gives the president authority to sanction those found helping Iran.

- Language intended to have the United States recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, which Jewish groups have sought for a number of years, was dropped from legislation included in the final budget bill passed by the House. The administration had threatened a veto if that provision was included, saying it would upset the Middle East peace process.

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