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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Appointment of 'Renaissance' head confirms the emphasis on education

By Julie Wiener

U.S. arms may have killed Israelis

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Evidence of direct Iranian involvement in the Hezbollah attacks emerged last week.

At that time, Israeli security officials identified anti-tank missiles weapons used by Hezbollah as being among the "Irangate" consignment that was delivered to Tehran as part of the United States' Iran-Contra deal. [Page 3]

Weizman unlikely to be charged

Israeli President Ezer Weizman is unlikely to face criminal charges for taking large sums of money from a French millionaire friend, according to Israel's state prosecutor.

Edna Arbel predicted an early end to a police inquiry into the case.

But she added Monday, "I don't rule out the possibility that a report will be written that will make clear to the public what happened." [Page 4]

Clinton: Process in 'tough patch'

The Middle East peace process is "in a little tough patch right now," President Clinton said in an interview with CNN.

But Clinton said he remains optimistic that Israel will reach agreements with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians.

Peace is clearly in the interest of all parties and "we're so close on the substance," he said.

Jewish leaders arrive in Moscow

A delegation of Jewish leaders arrived in Moscow for a three-day visit that will include meetings with top Russian politicians and leading Russian Jewish officials.

The group from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, en route to Jerusalem for its annual meeting, is planning to meet with Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

The group was expected to discuss Russia's technology transfers to Iran, the periodic outbursts of Russian anti-Semitism and the country's upcoming presidential election.

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a sign that the new Jewish buzzwords of "renaissance and renewal" are intrinsically linked to education, a top Jewish education professional has been tapped to oversee a national push to infuse Jewish life with more meaning.

One of four pillars that will set the agenda for the newly formed United Jewish Communities, the national fund-raising and social service organization, Renaissance and Renewal was formed to promote increased collaboration among federations, the religious movements, Jewish educators and other Jewish organizations in strengthening Jewish identity and community. The other pillars address fund raising, Israel and overseas needs and human services/social policy.

Although the Renaissance and Renewal pillar's exact focus is still unclear, the selection of Jonathan Woocher — who will also continue in his role at the Jewish Education Service of North America, a coordinating body for formal and informal Jewish education providers around North America — indicates that advocates for education will have a strong voice within it.

Woocher, who has worked closely with the federation world, was instrumental in creating the Renaissance and Renewal pillar, drafting a platform statement on the topic last year that described Renaissance as efforts to create "a far more vibrant, engaging, content-full Jewish life for large numbers of Jews here and around the globe than we ever could have imagined just a few decades ago."

In his statement, Woocher suggested that the UJC work with other organizations in launching bold initiatives to expand and redesign Jewish programming for teens, develop a national infrastructure for teacher training through technology and create a "multifaceted support system to assist day schools striving for excellence."

Barry Shrage, who also authored a UJC platform statement on Renaissance and Renewal, described Woocher as an "ideal choice" to head the new pillar.

Shrage, the president of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies, said Woocher's remaining at JESNA means "he can marry the best of both organizations together and get more power for the investment."

UJC officials said they selected Woocher, who was a professor of Jewish communal studies at Brandeis University before coming to JESNA in 1986, for his combination of experience, connections with various players in Jewish life, expertise and familiarity with the federation world.

It is unclear how long Woocher will hold the two large jobs. UJC's president and chief executive officer, Stephen Solender, who for six months last year balanced his current job with his old post as executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York, said Woocher will head the pillar at least through the end of 2000.

"Whether he continues beyond that will be determined later," Solender said.

JESNA's president, Joe Kanfer, and other board members contacted described the arrangement as a temporary loan their organization is making to the UJC to help get the Renaissance pillar off the ground. "It's a temporary move," said Kanfer.

For his part, Woocher was somewhat cryptic about the future.

"At this point it is what it is," he said, adding repeatedly, "I have no intention of leaving JESNA."

Also unclear at this point is how the new pillar will work with JESNA and to what extent their efforts will overlap. With both housed in UJC's Manhattan headquarters and sharing an executive, the relationship will undoubtedly be close. In what may be an

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. warns of possible attack

The U.S. State Department cautioned American citizens traveling in Israel to heed warnings of a possible terror attack.

Citing an advisory by Israeli security officials, the State Department said Americans should "be on the alert for any suspicious packages or objects, and to report any unusual activities or observations to the police." Israeli officials issued the initial warning after an important deadline was missed in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Arafat calls for intervention

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat called for urgent U.S. intervention to help break a stalemate in peace talks with Israel.

The intervention is necessary "to prevent an explosion of the situation," Arafat was quoted as saying Sunday.

On the same day, a gathering of Arafat loyalists passed a resolution saying they will declare statehood by September, with or without Israel's approval.

Levy: Reports of new talks false

Israel's foreign minister quashed reports that Israel and Syria would return to the negotiating table within two weeks. "There is no calming" of the hostilities in Lebanon and "there is no renewal" of the stalled talks with Damascus, David Levy told Israel Radio.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes attacked suspected Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon.

Druse protest Israeli rule

Hundreds of Druse villagers gathered in the Golan Heights to demand that Israel return the area to Syria. Israeli police fired tear gas after Druse youths began pelting them with stones.

On the Syrian side of the border, other Druse gathered Monday to hold a sympathy protest.

early demonstration of that relationship, discussion about implementing recommendations of a recently released JESNA task force report urging greater communal funding for Jewish day schools is expected to be the first item on the Renaissance and Renewal pillar's agenda.

However UJC officials, Woocher and JESNA board members maintain that JESNA will remain an independent entity with its own board and programs. Beyond that, Woocher said it is too soon for him to comment further on the relationship between the two. JESNA's Kanfer predicted that the pillar will be the "focal point for bringing national attention to key issues of renaissance for communities," while the actual work will continue to be done in agencies like JESNA, Hillel, the Jewish Community Centers Association and the religious movements, all of which are represented on the pillar.

Beryl Geber, the pillar's chair, agreed, saying that "there are certain overlaps, but JESNA has its own vision" and that the pillar "has a different focus and will lean heavily on its partners in order to ensure that work is getting done."

Geber said she was eager to begin the pillar's work.

With the hiring of Woocher, all four of UJC's pillars are now staffed and active, said Solender, who said he hoped the Renaissance and Renewal pillar will offer national leadership in making "the identification with our Jewish heritage and religious tradition very exciting and very meaningful to the largest number of Jews." □

In throwback to Soviet days, Jewish learning unites community

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jewish higher education is booming across the former Soviet Union.

Courses in Judaica are currently being taught at nearly 100 universities and other academic institutions across the former Soviet Union, and every prestigious university in Russia has opened or is going to open a department for Jewish or biblical studies.

The overall number of students, roughly 4,000, is modest compared with numbers in the United States, but only 10 years ago, the Soviet authorities did not permit Jewish studies. Moreover, the field is still expanding — and in a return to Soviet days, crystallizing Jewish activities and activists.

A three-day annual conference on Jewish studies near Moscow earlier this month brought together 400 scholars — double last year's attendance — from across the former Soviet Union and around the world.

The conference is organized annually by Sefer — The Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization in the Former Soviet Union.

The previous annual conferences were high-level academic events, but this time the gathering was an important public event as well.

"Many presentations and discussions this time were not strictly academic, but dealt with various aspects of Jewish community life in today's Russia," said Victoriya Motchalova, the head of Sefer.

During the days of the Soviet Jewish underground, before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the Jewish national movement concentrated on studying Hebrew, Torah and Jewish history. Now, with its organizational life splintered among bickering factions, Russia's Jewish community is continuing this tactic of trying to gain self-identification and self-organization through academic and educational activities.

Many of the non-Jewish presenters at the conference first become attracted to Judaism through Jewish studies and research.

Archival research allowed Alexander Antchikhin, a history lecturer at a university in the city of Voronezh in southern Russia, to become acquainted with the history of the Jewish community there, which "opened for myself an entirely different world that I had not been aware of," he said.

The Sefer center, a nonprofit association set up and supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to promote and coordinate the teaching of Judaica subjects and Jewish research at institutions of higher learning in Russia, is widely considered one of the JDC's most successful ventures in the former Soviet Union. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Red Cross urged on Israeli group

The American Red Cross is urging the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement to accept the Red Cross Society in Israel.

American Red Cross President Bernadine Healy said the exclusion of Magen David Adom "is a betrayal of our fundamental principles, including humanity, impartiality, neutrality, unity and universality."

Rabbi: Cuban tolerance up

Religious tolerance in Cuba has greatly improved during the past six years, according to a rabbi who led an interfaith delegation to the country.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, organized a three-day mission last week to strengthen ties between the religious communities of Cuba and the United States.

Lawyer sentenced on reparations

A Berlin court sentenced a German lawyer to five-and-a-half years in jail for evading taxes on millions of dollars of commissions received for arranging German pensions for Israelis.

Frank Reppenhagen, 58, was found guilty Monday of not declaring some \$7 million in commissions collected between 1990 and 1997 from a government program set up in 1980 as part of Germany's Holocaust reparations.

Latvia to host meeting on Kalejs

Latvia plans to host a meeting later this week of international prosecutors who have gathered evidence against an alleged Nazi war criminal.

Delegations from the United States, Canada, Britain, Israel and Australia plan to examine allegations that Konrad Kalejs was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews, gypsies and Communists during World War II.

Canada shrugs on school funding

Canadian Jewish officials are disappointed after their government appeared to shrug off a U.N. ruling that Ontario's exclusive funding of Roman Catholic schools is discriminatory and violates an international treaty. In a response released Feb. 3 in Geneva, Canada acknowledged its responsibilities under the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but said education was a provincial matter.

eBay cracks down

The Internet's largest auction site said recently that items related to groups such as the Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan will have to meet certain criteria before they could be listed for sale.

eBay added that it would not allow listings that endorse hatred or racial intolerance.

Report: Israelis killed by U.S. arms Iran shipped to Hezbollah in Lebanon

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Arms shipped illegally by the United States to Iran via Israel may have been used in recent Hezbollah attacks in southern Lebanon that killed seven Israeli soldiers.

The allegation surfaced as Western intelligence sources are blaming Iran for the recent series of assaults by the Islamic militant group.

London's Sunday Telegraph quotes the sources as saying that the attacks have been fueled by a large Iranian shipment of weapons to Hezbollah.

Evidence of direct Iranian involvement in the Hezbollah attacks emerged last week, when Israeli security officials identified anti-tank missiles weapons used by Hezbollah as being among the "Irangate" consignment that was delivered to Tehran in the mid-1980s as part of the United States' arms-for-hostages deal.

That deal involved a convoluted series of transactions that involved arms sales to Iran aimed at securing the release of U.S. hostages held in Lebanon at the time.

The proceeds from those arms sales went to support anti-government forces in Nicaragua, known as Contras.

When word of the deals became public, it set off what came to be known as the Iran-Contra scandal and led to a U.S. congressional probe of almost every top official in the administration of President Reagan.

The recent Hezbollah attacks are said to have been personally authorized by Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as part of a broad military strategy.

They were designed to achieve two particular objectives, said the sources: to sabotage Israeli-Syrian peace talks and to boost conservative candidates in the Iranian elections.

These elections, which are to be held on Friday, are widely being seen as an indicator of the strength of the reformers in Iran.

Senior Iranian conservative leaders summoned to Tehran by Khamenei at the end of last year reportedly developed the strategy.

While authorizing the escalation, the Iranian spiritual leader reportedly said that every effort should be made to conceal Iran's involvement so that Syria would be blamed for the attacks and Israel would walk out of the talks going on at the time with Damascus.

A contingency plan has also reportedly been developed that will ensure that Hezbollah's military infrastructure in southern Lebanon survives even if Israel and Syria reach a peace accord.

In addition the Iranians are reported to be intensifying their military links with Palestinian extremists in southern Lebanon to help disrupt the peace process.

According to the Sunday Telegraph, experienced Iranian Revolutionary Guards are helping train Palestinian recruits at camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, while some of the recruits have been sent to Iran for training.

The newspaper said the Jewish state's ongoing bombing attacks on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon in retaliation for the Hezbollah attacks "will undoubtedly play into the hands of hard-line politicians in Tehran as they enter the final week of election campaigning."

At the same time, revelations that hard-liners are behind the attacks are likely to be deeply embarrassing for Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, a relative moderate who has worked hard to persuade the West that Iran is no longer involved in international terrorism.

In a related development, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Iran has put Hezbollah in charge of Islamic fundamentalist efforts to thwart Middle East peace efforts.

The paper said Monday that Hamas and Islamic Jihad, terror groups operating mainly in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, would come under the supervision of Hezbollah officials in Lebanon.

Talks to coordinate their efforts have already begun, the paper said. □

Revisionist is no historian, contends Holocaust scholar

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Holocaust revisionist David Irving has no right to call himself a historian, according to a leading scholar of Nazi Germany.

Richard Evans, a professor of modern history at Britain's prestigious Cambridge University, made the remark last week while testifying in the trial here where Irving is suing an American scholar, Professor Deborah Lipstadt, and her British publisher, Penguin Books, for libel on the basis of Lipstadt's 1994 book "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory."

Irving, who denies that Jews were systematically exterminated in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, is claiming that Lipstadt ruined his reputation and career by labeling him a Holocaust denier — and asserting that he twisted historical data to suit his own bias.

Irving's confrontation with Evans was just one that he had with other scholars last week who are testifying in the trial.

After producing a 740-page critique of Irving's historical method, Evans said he had been unprepared for the "sheer depth of duplicity" he had found in Irving's treatment of Holocaust-related historical sources. In his report, Evans asserted that Irving had relied on his audience lacking the time or the expertise to study his sources in order to discover the "distortions and manipulations."

Irving, who is representing himself, charged that Evans' "sweeping and rather brutal" attack on his career was based on personal animosity: "I think you dislike what I write and stand for and what you perceive my views to be," he said.

But Evans denied this was true and said he had sought to be as objective as possible when examining Irving's work.

Evans said he had little prior knowledge of the work, although he had thought of Irving as a sound historian. But he said he was "shocked" at what he found when he closely examined Irving's writings and speeches.

The court proceedings reinforced the view Evans had expressed in his report that Irving had fallen so far short of accepted standards of scholarship that "he doesn't deserve to be called a historian at all." But Irving declared that he was always "scrupulously fair," and the "total opposite of being unscrupulous and manipulative and deceptive, as you say in your report."

Evans agreed that Irving had a very wide knowledge of the Third Reich's source material and that he had discovered many new documents: "The problem for me," he said, "is what you do with them when you interpret them and write them up."

Irving's writings and speeches, said Evans, contained statements that he regarded as anti-Semitic — to the extent that he blamed the Jews for the Holocaust. Irving's belief that he was the target of "a worldwide Jewish conspiracy," Evans continued, was "a fantastic belief which has no grounds in fact."

Irving also had a bruising encounter last week with Professor Christopher Browning, of Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash., who also appeared as a witness for Lipstadt.

Asked by Irving to comment on a Nazi plan to settle Jews on the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar, Browning, author of four books and more than 35 academic papers on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, said it was a "bizarre fantasy." Browning added that the

result of such a population transfer would have been disastrous as "a large percentage of the people would have perished."

"I think," countered Irving, "that the Jews are a very sturdy people."

Earlier, military historian Sir John Keegan, compelled by subpoena to testify for Irving, said he found Irving's ideas to be "perverse," while his claim that Hitler did not know about the fate of the Jews until late 1943 "was so extraordinary it would defy reason." □

Ezer Weizman likely to be cleared as police investigation winds down

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman is unlikely to face criminal charges for taking large sums of money from a French millionaire, according to Israel's state prosecutor.

Edna Arbel said the police investigation of the affair involving Edouard Saroussi was coming to an end, and "in terms of the picture at present evolving, we aren't talking about a charge sheet."

In an interview Monday, she predicted an early end to the police inquiry, but added, "I don't rule out the possibility that a report will be written that will make clear to the public what happened."

Her comments came after police met twice with Weizman for lengthy questioning sessions in recent days. Last week, another police team questioned Saroussi at a hotel in Switzerland.

Weizman, Israel's seventh president, has acknowledged accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts from Saroussi from 1988 to 1993, when he served as a legislator and Cabinet minister.

But he has insisted they were personal gifts that he was not required to declare. He also insisted that he had offered Saroussi nothing in return.

In a special televised address to the nation Jan. 23, Weizman refused to resign or take a leave of absence pending the outcome of the police inquiry.

Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein and Arbel called in the police last month, when it appeared from a preliminary inquiry that a commercial relationship existed between Weizman and Saroussi at some time during the early 1980s.

This gave rise to a suspicion that the moneys may have been connected to that relationship, rather than a gift.

On Monday, Weizman admitted to reporters that he would not accept any more large gifts from any friend.

Earlier, without reference to the affair, Weizman had told some close associates that he would weigh stepping down later this year after serving seven years as president.

A veteran public figure who held key posts in the military and politics before becoming president, the 75-year-old Weizman is now in the second term of his presidency, which has spanned both left- and right-wing governments.

The outspoken Weizman has frequently been a counterbalance to government policy, pushing for progress when the peace process faltered and urging a slowdown during waves of terrorist attacks.

Most recently, he gave his unequivocal support to an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in order to reach peace with Syria. □