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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Morris Abram dies at 82

Morris Abram, the chairman of U.N. Watch, died Wednesday at 82.

A veteran Jewish leader who was chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations from 1986 to 1989, Abram advised five U.S. presidents and was the permanent U.S. representative to the United Nations in Geneva under President Bush. [Page 3]

Student-led prayers upheld

Student high school graduation addresses may include prayers, a U.S. appeals court ruled Wednesday.

If the student rather than the school decides on the commencement message and then delivers it, the message does not violate the separation between church and state, the court said in a case that began at a Florida high school.

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State condemned the ruling.

Shabbat papal meeting canceled

The main Jewish partner in formal dialogue with the Vatican will not be meeting with Pope John Paul II before his trip to the Holy Land after being offered some time on the Sabbath.

Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, had requested a meeting with the pope to wish him a healthy and fulfilling trip, but turned down a Saturday, March 18 talk.

Groups won't talk to Austria

Jewish groups negotiating on behalf of Holocaust survivors will not negotiate with the government of Austria on restitution issues because of the participation of the far-right Freedom Party in the country's coalition.

The decision comes amid frustration among Jewish groups with what they see as Austria's stonewalling on restitution and compensation for survivors.

SS veterans march through Riga

Hundreds of Latvian SS veterans marched through the center of Riga on Thursday.

Jewish and Russian groups have blasted the annual procession, saying it glorifies Latvia's Nazi sympathizers.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Battle for Jerusalem heats up and coalition could be casualty

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A surge forward on the Israeli-Palestinian peace track has catapulted the sensitive issue of Jerusalem's borders to the center of a political storm within Israel.

In a sign of just how fraught with political peril the issue has become, Prime Minister Ehud Barak made an embarrassing reversal Tuesday and canceled plans to give up a West Bank village on Jerusalem's fringes to Palestinian control.

The reversal — viewed as a capitulation to hawkish forces not only in the opposition, but within Barak's own coalition — came only hours after the Israeli media reported that he intended to transfer control of Anata and two other villages near Jerusalem.

The reports prompted Israeli hard-liners, including Interior Minister Natan Sharansky, to flock to Jewish settlements near Jerusalem to show their opposition to the plan.

The controversy came just a few days before Israel's Security Cabinet approved by a narrow 5-3 vote the withdrawal maps for the upcoming handover of 6.1 percent of West Bank land to the Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat accepted the maps after rejecting previous Israeli withdrawal proposals.

Israel's full Cabinet still has to vote on the maps, a move expected to happen on Sunday.

The new agreement comes as Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are due to resume in Washington after more than a month of deadlock and recriminations.

The talks were expected to start early next week, but on Thursday, the State Department said that no new date had been set.

The villages of Beitunia and Ubeidiya — with Anata no longer among them, at least for the time being — are to be handed over as part of the Jewish state's next West Bank withdrawal.

Barak and his aides decided that three other villages located even closer to the capital — Abu Dis, A-Ram and Azariya — will not yet be transferred to Palestinian control, despite Arafat's demands.

But the Barak government has hinted unmistakably that if the peace process with the Palestinians does indeed get back on track, those villages will also eventually be transferred.

These concessions have triggered vigorous opposition from all quarters, including rightist elements within Barak's coalition.

Even before Barak reversed his decision, government officials pointed out that Anata, Beitunia and Ubeidiya are not contiguous with the municipal borders of Jerusalem and that transferring them could not be seen as presenting the Palestinian Authority with an opportunity to encroach on the city.

But opposition spokesmen were quick to protest that Barak's concession flies in the face of his own repeated assurances that he would not support any encroachment on Jerusalem at all.

Those assurances were made in the face of a brewing storm over Abu Dis, A-Ram and Azariya — which are in effect suburbs of the capital.

The Palestinian Authority has long demanded that these villages, especially Abu

MIDEAST FOCUS

Group: Pope should remove cross

Pope John Paul II should take off his cross when he visits the Western Wall in Jerusalem, representatives of Israel's fervently Orthodox community said.

But the representatives, including lawmaker Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, said they would not formally ask the pope to do so.

Three Hamas members arrested

Palestinian police arrested three Hamas members in an apartment apparently filled with explosives.

The men had been on the loose since Israel raided a house of Hamas members in northern Israel earlier this month, according to Palestinian officials.

Report: Algeria wants Israel guns

Algeria's president is reportedly interested in purchasing defense equipment from Israel, according to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

The paper said the Algerians made contact with a private company previously headed by Danny Yatom, who left the firm nearly a year ago to become Prime Minister Ehud Barak's chief security and political adviser.

Clinton, Mubarak to meet

President Clinton and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will meet March 28 in Washington to discuss the Middle East peace process and other bilateral issues.

During his visit to the United States, Mubarak is also expected to meet with Vice President Al Gore.

Israel arrests art collector

Israeli police arrested an art collector suspected of stealing valuable artifacts from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem over the past three years.

Among the items found at the suspect's home were ancient pottery shards and containers dating to the eighth century.



Daily News Bulletin

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Dis, be transferred to full Palestinian control.

They are currently under Palestinian civilian control, with Israel having overall security responsibility.

The Palestinian Authority is currently completing the construction of a large new building in Abu Dis that is apparently designed to serve as the seat of its future legislative assembly.

Israeli observers believe that the Palestinian Authority is also planning to have its executive offices there as well.

Under a never-formalized, and never officially confirmed, 1993 understanding between now-Justice Minister Yossi Beilin and Arafat's second-in-command, Abu Mazen, Abu Dis was to serve as the capital of an eventual Palestinian state.

By investing this suburb, which is located less than half a mile from the Old City walls, with the status of an administrative and legislative center, the Palestinians were given the chance to satisfy their ambition to have Jerusalem as the capital of their planned state.

Beilin said over the weekend that he "would be happy" if the Palestinians agree to make Abu Dis their capital.

The Beilin-Abu Mazen plan has always been anathema to nationalist and rightist forces in Israeli politics.

The Barak government has never openly endorsed the plan — and indeed Barak has stolidly refused to transfer the suburbs of Abu Dis, A-Ram and Azariya to full Palestinian control.

But a statement last week by the premier's top political aide, Danny Yatom, that the government would consider the suburbs' transfer in the context of negotiations for a final peace deal, has thrown the political community into turmoil.

Those negotiations, which appeared to be receding at the height of Israeli-Palestinian tensions in February, now look to be closer than ever.

The two sides, under U.S. diplomatic prodding, have agreed to a new, intensified negotiating schedule that calls for a framework for a final peace treaty by May, the last phase of Israeli withdrawal by June and the final treaty itself by September.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, a leading Likud Party member, warned this week that to cede the three suburbs would be "to invite Palestinian takeover of Jerusalem itself."

Such a move would be the source of "endless conflict" in the future, the mayor added.

One Likud legislator who voiced support for the Abu Dis idea, Michael Eitan, was roundly criticized by party colleagues for breaking ranks and expressing a line diametrically opposed to that of the party and of the nationalist camp as a whole.

Further to the right, the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, blasted the government for its intention to cede the villages of Anata, Beitunia and Ubeidiya.

The council said the move would "place a noose" around the neck of the Jewish state's capital.

The lines are drawn for a battle over Jerusalem that could come quicker than anyone had anticipated or wanted.

It is a battle that could prove the undoing of Barak's government.

The National Religious Party, already threatening to quit the government over its plan to cede the Golan Heights as part of a peace deal with Syria, would presumably have further cause to secede if Barak goes ahead with the Abu Dis plan.

The position of another coalition member, the fervently Orthodox Shas Party — which has been squabbling with other coalition members over domestic issues — is also uncertain.

Barak and his aides, aware of future dangers that could quickly become present disasters if the Palestinian track indeed speeds up, are putting out feelers to a number of fence-sitters in the Knesset with a view to broadening the coalition.

One such object of their overtures is the United Torah Judaism bloc, the Ashkenazi, fervently Orthodox group that was originally part of the Barak coalition but soon dropped out.

This party, while hard-line where religious issues are concerned, is believed to be pragmatic on the peace process. □

JEWISH WORLD

OBITUARY

Jewish and civil rights leader remembered as fighter for equality

By Brianne Korn

NEW YORK (JTA) — Morris Abram, long known as a champion of democracy and equality for Jews and non-Jews, died Wednesday at 82.

Most recently known for his efforts in founding U.N. Watch in Geneva, a cooperative effort with international organizations monitoring and combating anti-Semitism, Abram has advocated for social justice in leadership positions for almost 40 years.

"His span and imprint extended the entire latter half of the 20th century," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, a partner with the American Jewish Committee in U.N. Watch. "He's one of the last giants."

Abram served as the chairman of the organization since its inception in 1993 and as the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva under President Bush. He served as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations from 1986 to 1989, president of the American Jewish Committee from 1963 to 1968 and chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry from 1983 to 1988.

"He guided the organization and movement through some of the most difficult times," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ. Abram led the group during a time when Soviet Jews were being denied free travel.

"He had leadership and strength of character that few possess."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, called Abram's death "a great loss for the Jewish community. He was a man of unique stature and achievement. He earned respect throughout the world."

A native of Georgia and a Rhodes Scholar, Abram began his career as an attorney and served on the American prosecution staff in the 1946 Nuremberg Trials. He overcame leukemia during his lifetime and wrote an autobiography called "The Day Is Short."

"Everything I have ever done on behalf of Jewish interests is part of a quilt," Abram once said, "to try to create tolerance for all of us."

Abram's influence extended past the sphere of Jewish concerns as he played an integral role in the civil rights movement.

Serving under five American presidents, Abram was co-chairman of the White House Conference on Civil Rights in the mid-1960s.

"I do not believe that many southern white people have had a longer experience in support of civil rights than Mr. Abram," said the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. in 1983 in support of President Reagan's nomination of Abram to the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights.

Abram "accomplished so much in the U.S. and around the world in areas that were outside the Jewish community," said Shai Franklin, director of governmental relations at the NCSJ, who worked with Abram in Geneva. "Morris had an overriding sense of fairness. He insisted on looking at issues fairly but always with an eye to how can we make a difference."

The AJCommittee honored Abram in December with its National Distinguished Leadership Award.

"Morris is an icon," said AJCommittee President Bruce Ramer at the reception. "In the laws in civil rights, in academia, in the Jewish world. He is a great and innovative leader."

Abram also served as chairman of the United Negro College Fund and as a board member of the Weizman Institute of Science in Israel.

"He made outstanding contributions to Jewish and general human rights of all people," said Hyman Bookbinder, Washington representative emeritus of the AJCommittee, who worked at the group under Abram's presidency.

"He was the first in 10 presidents under whom I worked. He was clearly one of the best." □

Money awarded to boost shuls

A philanthropic partnership focused on transforming the synagogue awarded its first grants, totaling \$275,000.

Synagogue Transformation and Renewal awarded money to six entities, including a group working to revitalize more than 30 congregations and two consultants with extensive contacts in the Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal movements.

Philanthropists Charles Schusterman, Michael Steinhardt and Edgar Bronfman are funding the STAR project.

Patton's letter taken from exhibit

A California library removed U.S. Gen. George S. Patton's letter explaining how he obtained a copy of the Nuremberg Laws.

The move by the Huntington Library in Pasadena, Calif., comes after researchers decided that Patton had no right to take the documents in 1945.

The Nazis issued the laws in 1935 to restrict various aspects of Jewish life in Germany.

Israeli teens rally against Haider

Some 3,000 Israeli teen-agers rallied in Jerusalem against the inclusion of the xenophobic Freedom Party in Austria's government.

Rock bands and dance troupes performed at the event as the teens cursed the name of Jorg Haider, the de facto head of the party.

French rabbi to head group

A European rabbinical group elected France's chief rabbi as its president, marking what is believed to be the first time a rabbi from Great Britain has not headed the group.

The Conference of European Rabbis' election of French Chief Rabbi Yosef Sitruck is also believed to mark the first time the group has had a Sephardi rabbi as its leader.

Italian death camp defaced

Anti-Semitic graffiti was scrawled on the outer walls of the former San Sabba death camp near Trieste in northern Italy, the only World War II death camp on Italian soil.

The graffiti, written overnight, included a star of David hanging from a gallows, and the German slogan "Juden raus" — out with the Jews.

Clowning around on the Internet

A Web discussion group focuses on ways to "down Jewishly," according to its founder, clown Raspberry Hamantashen.

The list can be joined by logging onto www.geocities.com/jgirlscout/j-down.html.

Jewish family sues Palestinians in U.S. court for children's deaths

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The family of a Jewish couple killed in Israel in 1996 by Palestinian terrorists have filed a \$250 million federal lawsuit against the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, the PLO and Hamas.

The lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court in Providence, R.I., on Monday claims that Palestinian officials were responsible for the drive-by shooting of Yaron and Efrat Ungar, Americans who lived in the West Bank, because they allowed the Islamic fundamentalist group to operate training facilities and store weapons in Palestinian-controlled parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Four members of Hamas were convicted of the crime and are now in jail in Israel; one remains at-large. They, along with the commander and co-commander of the Palestinian General Intelligence Services, and the Palestinian police chief, also were named as defendants in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit blames the Palestinian authorities for refusing or ignoring American and Israeli demands to prevent further terrorism. The lawsuit further alleges that Palestinian officials provided Hamas with a "safe haven and a base of operations" and permitted and or encouraged Hamas to "operate freely and conduct activities in the territory under their control."

Despite repeated requests by the Israeli government, the Palestinians refused to surrender terrorist suspects and even employed some suspects as policemen or security officials, according to the plaintiffs, which include the couple's two children, aged 4 and 5.

In addition the Palestinians' financial support to the families of Hamas terrorists who had been captured or killed while carrying out terrorist acts is an incentive to continue violence and terrorism, according to the lawsuit.

Khalil Foutah, a spokesman for the Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington, had no comment on the case.

The lawsuit is based on a statute that gives federal courts jurisdiction over cases of American citizens who are injured in foreign countries by acts of terrorism. Survivors or heirs of the victims may sue in any U.S. District Court.

Congress enacted the law after victims of the 1985 PLO hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship had difficulty with their civil suits.

Should the Ungar family win the case, whatever judgment they are awarded may be difficult to claim.

A similar lawsuit was brought against Iran by the family of Alisa Flatow, a 20-year-old New Jersey student who was killed in a bus bombing in 1995.

The Flatows won a \$247.5 million judgment, but have not been able to collect any damages, in part because of opposition from the Clinton administration.

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee recently endorsed legislation that allows American victims of terrorism to collect court judgments through the seizure of frozen assets of countries that support terror.

But the Justice for Victims of Terrorists Act faces opposition from the Clinton administration, which has claimed the law could result in retaliation against U.S. diplomatic properties abroad. □

Mysterious feminists make noise for Purim, and some aren't amused

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — They're back.

A mysterious group of Jewish feminists that circulated provocative Rosh Hashanah cards and advertisements in the New York area last fall has resurfaced for Purim.

Jewish Women Watching, a group that does not identify its members and leaves only an e-mail address — jewishwomenwatching@hotmail.com — as contact information, is mailing to Jewish agencies groggers that say "drown out sexism," along with a card protesting sexism.

A JTA e-mail query requesting more information was not answered.

Last year women — wearing masks — picketed outside the UJA-Federation of Greater New York to protest a lack of female speakers at a major event.

The current Jewish Women Watching's card, which notes "a few reasons to make noise," plays on the Purim theme by stating that the biblical figure Esther, "spoke on behalf of the entire Jewish people," while only one woman has delivered a "State of World Jewry Address" at the 92nd Street Y, a Jewish institution on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Furthermore, alleges the card, "Vashti's not the only woman who had to strip to keep her job. Even in the Jewish world three out of four women endure sexual harassment in the workplace."

As the story of Esther recounts, Vashti refused to come to King Ahaseverus when he demanded. It is not clear where the group got its figures on sexual harassment.

The card also asserts that few women fill top executive positions at national Jewish organizations and fewer than 50 women sit on the combined boards of the Anti-Defamation League and the United Jewish Communities, the Jewish community's central fund-raising and social service agency.

According to a list provided by the ADL, 48 of its more than 240 board members around the country are women. At the UJC, 35 of the 137 members of the newly created national board of trustees are women. A 1997 study commissioned by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side found that women made up 25 percent of the boards of 45 major Jewish organizations.

Susan Weidman Schneider, the editor of the feminist Jewish magazine *Lilith*, praised the Purim card for its wit.

However, Abraham Foxman, the national director of the ADL, said he believes that an anonymous group "has no value." He also said his group is making an effort to bring more women into leadership roles.

Gail Hyman, the UJC's vice president of marketing and public affairs, said she had not yet seen Jewish Women Watching's card criticizing her organization, but upon hearing about it said the anonymous group has "an interesting approach" and the issues it raises are "important."

In building its new board, the UJC made a "very special effort" to increase representation of women, said Hyman.

"This is an improvement over where we were and we're working toward greater participation," she added. "This isn't the end of the story, it's the beginning of the story." □