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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Mubarak meets Clinton

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said he is hopeful that American support will help Israelis and Palestinians reach an agreement by Sept. 13. Mubarak's comments Tuesday came before he met with President Clinton in Cairo to discuss ways to break the logjam in the peace process.

Clinton is scheduled to hold bilateral meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat next week in New York, where all will be attending the U.N. Millennium Summit.

Meanwhile, U.S. envoy Dennis Ross traveled to Israel for further discussions on overcoming obstacles to an agreement.

Church to give \$2.3 million

Germany's Roman Catholic Church will pay \$2.3 million to compensate Nazi-era forced laborers.

But the German government's chief negotiator for a compensation fund for slave and forced laborers criticized the move because the money will not go into that fund. Instead, the Catholic Church will only give the money to laborers employed by the church.

Germany's Protestant churches have agreed to pay \$4.6 million to the general fund, which was created under an agreement reached by the German government, German businesses and international Jewish groups.

Disease-causing gene found

Israeli scientists have located the gene responsible for a genetic disease more prevalent among Ashkenazi Jews than the rest of the population that causes mental and motor deficiencies, including blindness, muteness and the inability to walk.

One out of every 100 Ashkenazi Jews carries ML4, the gene that carries mucopolidosis, and more than 80 percent of people afflicted with the disease worldwide are Ashkenazi Jews.

Both parents must be carriers in order for the disease to be passed on.

Because of the Labor Day holiday in the U.S., the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 4.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

B'nai B'rith searches for a future amid changes in U.S. Jewish life

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — When B'nai B'rith International activists gathered this week for a convention in Washington, it was the first time in the organization's 157-year-old history that the sitting president faced a serious challenger.

Richard Heideman, the incumbent, ended up winning by a vote of 236-111, but many within the organization say the mere fact that he was challenged was a sign of grass-roots dissatisfaction with this historically notable but long-troubled institution.

A Washington lawyer, Heideman has overseen major budget cuts during the past two years. His zeal for change — particularly a failed effort earlier this year to form a partnership between the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and the Jewish Community Centers of North America — has rankled many members.

Interviewed before the election, Heideman's opponent, Daniel Frank of Minnetonka, Minn., described his campaign as "a calling from the grass roots of the organization."

"The emphasis must be not from top to bottom but from the bottom up," said Frank, one of B'nai B'rith's five senior vice presidents.

It is hardly news that B'nai B'rith — buffeted simultaneously by Jewish assimilation and Americans' shrinking interest in membership organizations — is sharply declining in the United States, although membership in the other 157 countries where B'nai B'rith exists has remained fairly stable.

Adult membership in the United States is now slightly more than 100,000, less than a third of what it was 20 years ago.

Other American Jewish membership organizations have also seen drops in the membership rolls. But serious financial problems and a lack of clarity about its mission have compounded B'nai B'rith's woes.

For years, B'nai B'rith leaders were accused of ignoring the problems and allowing a multimillion-dollar deficit to accumulate. Now its leaders are addressing the financial challenges. In the past two years, \$4 million has been cut from the current \$13.5 million budget, and staff has been reduced from 275 to 225.

Under the previous president, the group altered its national infrastructure, replacing a network of seven districts with a system of 18 regions.

But the various changes have fueled discontent among some longtime members.

Meyer Rosenthal, a former district president in New Jersey, said the regions "don't have the respect or communications of the local leaders" and that "local people feel disenfranchised."

B'nai B'rith, said Rosenthal, "has kind of lost touch with its members."

Founded as a men's fraternal organization in 1843, B'nai B'rith is one of America's oldest Jewish organizations, and consists of a network of "lodges" — local groups of people who get together to socialize, volunteer and raise money for charitable causes.

That sort of group has gone out of fashion, however.

In recent decades, said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, "the most successful organizations have been single-issue organizations," such as the Simon Wiesenthal Center and American Israel Public Affairs Committee, because "people know what they are giving to."

B'nai B'rith is certainly not a single-issue organization. Ask a member what the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Russian teens go to Israel

About 150 teen-agers from the former Soviet Union arrived in Israel last week as part of the Jewish Agency for Israel's Selah and Chalom programs designed to absorb teen-agers through study programs. In September, an additional 850 young people will join these programs.

More than 1,000 of the 1,310 new immigrants who arrived in Israel last week were from the former Soviet Union, according to the Jewish Agency.

Sharon may back Barak's reforms

Israeli Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon hinted he may support some of the social reforms proposed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Barak declared the launch of legislation earlier this month that includes a constitution and the legalization of civil marriage — reforms staunchly opposed by the religious parties.

Sharon also suggested the Likud has not ruled out the possibility of a national unity government

Israel razes Palestinian houses

Israeli forces demolished three partially completed Palestinian houses in a refugee camp in eastern Jerusalem. Israel said it took the action Tuesday because the buildings were illegal and unoccupied.

Shells injure excavators

Two workers with the Antiquities Authority were slightly injured by explosives that detonated during salvaging excavations in an Israeli army firing zone.

Israeli dies of West Nile virus

An 84-year-old Israeli man died this week of a mosquito-transmitted virus that has killed at least seven people in the New York area during the past two summers. Israeli officials said they would increase spraying against mosquitos, but said the West Nile virus is common in the Middle East and that most Israelis have developed immunity.



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organization does, and he or she will talk about its youth group, which has had its allocation from B'nai B'rith cut by 21 percent in the past year; its network of senior housing, funded by the federal government but managed by B'nai B'rith; its advocacy for Israel in the United Nations; and its international presence.

Rarely will anyone say what particular issues B'nai B'rith stands for.

The group is often compared to a father whose children have moved out of the house. It founded the Anti-Defamation League and the campus student organization, Hillel, but both have become independent entities with far larger operating budgets than B'nai B'rith itself.

Hillel, which in the early 1990s dropped the words B'nai B'rith from its name, still receives approximately half a million dollars from the group but receives more than 10 times that amount from Jewish federations.

Even B'nai B'rith's wife of sorts, B'nai B'rith Women, left the house in 1990. For five years, the group, which reports membership of 40,000, paid hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to use the B'nai B'rith name. Then it became Jewish Women International and made domestic violence its central issue.

With budget cuts now hitting BBYO, will the 30,000-member youth group — described repeatedly as B'nai B'rith's "crown jewel" — be the next to leave? "It won't become a separate agency as long as I'm president," said Heideman, noting that B'nai B'rith recently launched a special fund-raising campaign for the youth group.

But fears of losing BBYO may have fueled the resistance this spring to Heideman's "vision statement" for a partnership. The statement suggested making BBYO the official youth group of the Jewish community centers movement.

It was a move BBYO leaders — including the teens themselves — saw as untenable, and these opponents succeeded in ending the discussion.

The opponents, who are quick to point out that they were not consulted until the statement had already been approved by B'nai B'rith's executive committee, say it would have ceded control to the Jewish community centers, which are only loosely joined together and thus not accountable to their national movement.

"My feeling was the individual chapters would've become nothing more than JCC youth groups," said Hal Polon, chair of BBYO's largest region, covering northern New Jersey, New York's northern suburbs and upstate New York.

David Lewis, a Cherry Hill, N.J., BBYO member whose chapter — like 18 others — already has a relationship with the local JCC, is critical of the arrangement, noting that the time of BBYO staff there is divided with responsibilities at the JCC and that space constraints at the JCC make it difficult for BBYO members to get rooms for meetings and events.

So, what future does B'nai B'rith have?

Leaders at the top assert that while B'nai B'rith may never return to its glory days, it is poised for a resurgence.

They point to a newly balanced budget, more young people recruited for top leadership positions and a host of new programs designed to attract young members.

The organization is launching new membership categories and affinity groups, such as ones for amateur athletes, young couples, singles, alumni of BBYO and the Jewish fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi. That is in addition to existing "Impact" groups, a handful of local B'nai B'rith chapters for people in their 20s and 30s.

But if Jewish youth group affiliation is any indicator, the next generation of Jews will be no more likely to join than their parents. Leaders in most Jewish youth groups report declining participation in year-round activities, with teens instead more likely to attend camps or Israel trips.

"I think the restructuring addressed the easiest part of the problem and no one bothered to address the harder part, the base problem, which is a philosophical one. Who are we? What are we? What's our focus?" said Polon.

"I don't know what the future is," he said.

Nonetheless, B'nai B'rith leaders insist the picture is brighter. "You can choose to paint B'nai B'rith as old and outdated, and that's yesterday's news," said Heideman. "Today's news is we've come a long way in two years. We have a lot more to accomplish, but we're on the road in a positive way." □

(JTA correspondent Sharon Samber in Washington contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Museum to wait on disputed art

Boston's Museum of Fine Arts rejected a Dutch museum's request to return a painting stolen by Nazi leader Hermann Goering, according to Reuters.

The museum says it will return "Landscape With Burning City," by Henri met de Bles, once it is determined who the rightful owner is.

Terror victims call for extradition

U.S. and Canadian terror victims called on President Clinton to demand the extradition of a Hamas terrorist who is reportedly responsible for planning a number of attacks over several years in which three Americans and 21 Israelis were killed.

The Zionist Organization of America and several other Jewish groups also say Mahmoud Abu Hanoud should be surrendered to the United States.

Israel is not seeking the extradition of Abu Hanoud, who is in the custody of the Palestinian Authority after escaping a weekend shootout with Israeli soldiers.

Confusion about Hadassah's past

A Czech magazine is calling into question details about the Jewish background of the Czech-born wife of Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman.

Tyden magazine daimed last week that international media and the White House have published inaccurate information about Hadassah Lieberman's family history.

Lieberman herself also disputes most of the same claims.

Among the daims disputed by the magazine are that Lieberman's father was a former chief rabbi of Czechoslovakia and that he was a lawyer in Prague.

Ukrainian Jews break camp

Some 120 adults and children from the Jewish communities of Ukraine finished a 12-day summer camp devoted to the study of Judaism, Zionism and Jewish identity.

The camp near the Black Sea was sponsored by the Metro West Federation of New Jersey with the support of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

U.S. arrests neo-Nazi

U.S. officials arrested a German neo-Nazi fugitive who reportedly had been staying for several weeks with a white separatist in West Virginia.

Hendrik Moebus, 24, was convicted in 1994 along with two accomplices for kidnapping and strangling a teen-ager he described as "non-Aryan." Paroled in 1998, he reportedly entered the U.S. in December from Germany.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak tries to stay politically alive just long enough to sign peace deal

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ehud Barak and his shrunken center-left government are living on borrowed time — and the rightist-religious opposition this week moved to call in the loan.

But the Israeli prime minister insists that it's not time to pay up yet, and he proposes to keep putting off the collectors as long as there is still hope of clinching a peace deal with the Palestinians.

On Tuesday, Barak assessed that hope at 50-50 following a meeting in Cairo between President Clinton, on his way back home from African, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The next test will come Sept. 6, when Clinton, Barak and Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Authority president, will all be in New York for the U.N. Millennium Summit.

U.S. diplomats are working to produce sufficient momentum in the negotiations to enable the Mideast players to use that New York gathering as a jumping-off point for direct top-level dialogue.

The key issue of dispute is still Jerusalem.

The latest opposition effort to thwart Barak's efforts to clinch a peace deal involves a bill, signed by 62 of the 120 Knesset members, that would forbid a prime minister from negotiating over the country's borders if he has lost the support of the majority of the legislature.

The initiative was launched by Moledet Knesset member Benny Elon. Since there can be no private member's legislation during the recess, Elon introduced the bill Monday in the form of a motion for the agenda.

While there is no possibility of the initiative becoming law at this time, the opposition has strongly articulated its point: The government does not enjoy the confidence of a majority of the legislators in the peace negotiations; and most members do not want Barak to sign an accord with Arafat and then submit it to the nation, either in a referendum or as the central issue in an early election.

Elon and other rightists, among them the soft-spoken former Defense Minister Moshe Arens, say it is unprecedented in parliamentary democracies for a government to conduct international negotiations on the nation's vital interests while lacking the support of the legislature.

But those same Knesset members who oppose the premier's policy are not prepared to do the one thing that they are constitutionally capable of doing, even during the recess: pass a vote of no confidence against him.

No-confidence motions voted on just before the summer recess failed to reach the requisite 61 votes. If such a vote were passed by 61 or more, the government falls automatically and new elections are held after 90 days.

Barak has not appointed new ministers in place of the members of Shas, the National Religious Party and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah who resigned earlier in the summer because he cannot be sure of winning Knesset approval for such appointments.

Instead, he has named Labor Party men as "acting ministers" in the various vacant departments, a move that does not need Knesset authorization.

Barak maintains that even with his government's sagging parliamentary fortunes, he still has a mandate from the people based on last year's elections.

But apart from Barak and former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who is weighing a political comeback if the state prosecution decides not to bring charges against him in a bribery investigation — few Israeli politicians still support the two-vote system, one for prime minister and one for party, that brought Barak to power.

Many opposed the law, which was introduced before the 1996 elections that brought Netanyahu to power, from the outset.

They have been joined by an increasing number of Knesset members and academics who have been convinced by the practical experience of recent years that the system is flawed. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Declaration on anti-Jewish pope is called 'a beatification too far'***By Ruth E. Gruber*

VATICAN CITY (JTA)—Pope John Paul II will formally set his 19th century predecessor Pope Pius IX on the road to sainthood in a solemn beatification ceremony on Sept. 3 that declares him "blessed."

Beatification, in the Roman Catholic Church, is the last step before sainthood.

The honor has raised a chorus of protest among Jews, who have warned that the move could have serious repercussions for Jewish-Catholic relations.

Pius IX, who reigned from 1846 to 1878, was the last pope to confine Jews to the ghetto and became infamous for ordering the 1858 kidnapping of a young Jewish boy, Edgardo Mortara, who had been secretly baptized as a baby.

Pius' policy toward Jews was described by one Italian historian as "trickery, arrogance and cruelty." The British Jewish historian Cecil Roth compared conditions for Jews under Pius' reign to those of Jews under prewar Nazi Germany.

For Jews, the beatification of Pius IX simply doesn't square with repeated recent church apologies for past anti-Semitism, which culminated with John Paul's prayers in Jerusalem in March.

The latest such apology came this past weekend, when church leaders in John Paul's native Poland asked forgiveness for the church's toleration of anti-Semitism and its disdain of non-Catholics.

The contradiction is particularly striking because Pius IX is not being beatified on his own.

In the same ceremony, John Paul will beatify another, quite different, past pope — Pope John XXIII, the universally beloved pontiff who died in 1963 and whose five-year reign marked a turning point in church history and in Jewish-Catholic relations.

John XXIII helped Jews during the Holocaust and convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

The Council's decisions revolutionized the church and opened it up to the modern world.

Among its pronouncements was the *Nostra Aetate* declaration in 1965, which formally absolved Jews from having killed Jesus and opened the way for Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

"If saintliness is seen as the goodness, wisdom and courage to behave righteously and right wrongs regardless of when they occur, then Pius IX's conduct falls far short of saintliness," Seymour Reich, the chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, wrote in a letter to the Vatican last week.

"His papal role stands in sharp contrast to that of the saintly Pope John XXIII and John Paul II, who recognized the wrongs of the past and sought to rectify them," he wrote to Archbishop Jose Saraiva Martins, chairman of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Reich called Pius IX "the pope who perpetuated centuries-old church contempt and hatred for Jews," and he branded the kidnapping of Mortara an "assault on Judaism and parenthood."

"Only the church itself," wrote Reich, had the right to determine who are its saints, but he stressed that "when the issue

of sainthood embodies matters of major Jewish concern, we believe the Jewish community has an obligation to voice its reaction."

The conflicting message inherent in twinning the beatifications of two such utterly different popes has raised questions among many liberal Catholics and other observers, as well as among Jews.

James Walston, a professor of political science at the American University in Rome, called the pairing "appallingly dishonest."

Said the Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, "Two popes of a more different temper would be hard to find." It called the decision to beatify Pius IX "a beatification too far."

British church historian Owen Chadwick was quoted as stating that Pius's record "verges on the criminal."

The Mortara affair was emblematic of Pius IX's policy toward Jews. Seven-year-old Edgardo was seized from his home in Bologna on the pope's orders, after a servant told a priest that she secretly baptized the boy when he was a baby.

The boy was brought to Rome, where he was virtually adopted by Pius IX and brought up as a Catholic.

"Some have sought to justify the coming beatification on the grounds that Pius IX's actions should not be viewed through 21st century eyes and that he was merely following the practices of the times," Reich wrote in his letter. "But even in the 19th century, actions such as the Mortara kidnapping were viewed with shock and condemnation."

Indeed, the incident sparked loud international protests. Emperors Franz Joseph of Austria and Napoleon III of France urged the pope to give up the child, but he remained adamant. Mortara eventually became a priest and died in 1940.

But in addition to his policy toward Jews, it is Pius IX's role as a Catholic reactionary that also alarms many contemporary observers.

The last pope to rule over a government in Italy, Pius IX saw the vast Papal States of central Italy wrested from papal control during Italy's unification process, beginning in 1848.

Deeply conservative, he condemned anyone who believed that the pope "can and should reconcile himself with progress, liberalism and modern civilization." He also fervently championed the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Beatifying Pius IX and John XXIII together sends a message that is troubling to observers who fear long-term implications in Vatican policy as the Roman Catholic church enters its third millennium.

"The joint ceremony will form a coded warning that liberalism can only operate within strict limits," wrote Rupert Shortt, a former assistant editor of *The Tablet*.

He warned that it exemplified Pope John Paul II's own highly conservative agenda regarding dissension within the church — just as the Vatican's "regular silencing of independently minded theologians" has done throughout John Paul's reign.

Said Walston, "With the joint beatification, John Paul and conservatives want to put these very different two popes, John XXIII and Pius IX, on the same plane."

Essentially, he said, the decision reaffirms papal infallibility — whatever the policy and politics of the pope.

"The message is that popes are equally authoritative, always right, regardless of whether one says something is white and the other says it is black," he said. □