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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak pessimistic on talks

It is the Palestinians' turn to show flexibility in peace talks, said Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak before he left for New York.

Barak is now in the United States, where he and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat were expected to hold separate talks on the sidelines of this week's U.N. Millennium Summit. Barak added that he did not believe a breakthrough is imminent.

Controversial pope beatified

Pope John Paul II beatified a 19th-century pope who ordered the kidnapping of a Jewish boy. Sunday's beatification of Pius IX, the last step before sainthood, came despite worldwide Jewish protests.

On Saturday, Jews and others held a candlelight vigil in Rome against the move and Israel expressed "deep sorrow" over the beatification.

The 20th-century Pope John XXIII, admired by both Jews and Catholics, was also beatified.

Thousands back jailed leader

Tens of thousands of Israeli supporters of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party turned out in Israel to cheer Aryeh Deri, a former party leader who reported to prison Sunday to begin serving a three-year sentence for accepting bribes. [Page 3]

Hillary helps Pollard

Hillary Rodham Clinton intervened to prevent Jonathan Pollard from being transferred to a more dangerous unit in the U.S. prison where he is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

The action by the candidate for U.S. senator from New York, which came in late August, is being seen as an attempt to court Jewish voters in advance of November's election.

Reports: Saddam has cancer

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein is suffering from endocrine cancer and his son Qusay has assumed many of his duties, according to news reports.

Saddam appointed Qusay, who is reportedly in charge of the government's security apparatus, to head a leadership committee in the event Saddam dies or is unable to rule. Saddam's health has deteriorated in recent days, according to the reports.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish groups try to keep agenda out front in election-year Congress

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Now that summer is over, let the positioning and politicking begin.

As members of Congress set out to complete its work for the year in a tight schedule of several weeks before they go out on the campaign trail, Jewish groups will try to keep their issues at the center of the agenda.

While some issues have been mostly settled for the moment, such as foreign aid to Israel, other issues, such as hate crimes and social service funding, are still waiting to be resolved.

The anticipated intense period might not materialize since the priority will be on spending bills and not on particular pieces of legislation.

That spells out something along the lines of "wait until next year" for issues like gun control.

But the call for a national hate crimes law, which has become an issue in the presidential campaign, probably has its best chance right now. The proposed law has the support of the administration and this year being an election year could work out well for supporters of the bill.

Lawmakers want to have something to show the voters, said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"This is the kind of issue that could break through," Pelavin said.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act would expand the federal hate crimes statute to protect anyone who is the victim of violent crimes based on gender, disability or sexual orientation.

The current law protects victims of crimes based on race, color, religion and ethnicity.

The Senate already passed a version of the bill June 20, but it must now pass the House of Representatives, where support is not as strong.

It is possible that the current Senate hate crimes amendment to the defense authorization bill, which is now being worked on by the House and Senate, could become law if the whole bill is passed. But that scenario is unlikely — and the challenge for Jewish groups will be to get the support of the House leadership and pass the legislation as a free-standing bill or as part of an omnibus spending bill.

"We have to show that this is a must-pass piece of legislation," said Michael Lieberman, counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Some Jewish groups have been working over the recess with the grass-roots movement that sponsored the Web site unitedagainsthate.org, as well as lobbying members on Capitol Hill.

Many organizations signed a letter to lawmakers who have not yet supported the bill.

Still, most of the legislative schedule will be taken up with spending bills. The Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill is of concern to some Jewish organizations.

The United Jewish Communities is watching the bill, where millions have been cut in negotiations, to see if funding levels for senior housing, nursing homes and other social services are adequate.

"We want to make sure promises are kept," said Diana Aviv, the group's vice

MIDEAST FOCUS

Cabinet dismantles ministry

The Israeli Cabinet approved the dismantling of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the distribution of its power to various government ministries and local authorities.

Acting Religious Affairs Minister Yossi Beilin, who has proposed the idea, said it was intended to separate politics from religious services.

Barak: No concern on Iraq

There is no reason to be concerned that Iraq might attack Israel during the coming months, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said, but the government is monitoring the situation.

Barak's comments last week came in response to a report that the U.S. military put a Patriot antimissile battery on alert because Iraq may threaten Israel during the U.S. presidential campaign.

Vote on new elections scheduled

A bill to dissolve the Israeli Knesset and schedule new elections is to be heard on Oct. 3, which is the opening of its winter session, the sponsor of the legislation said.

Survivor named envoy to Poland

The Israeli government approved the appointment of former Knesset speaker Shevach Weiss to be the country's ambassador to Poland.

Weiss, a Holocaust survivor born in Poland, currently serves as international chairman of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Tel Aviv to go green for a day

Tel Aviv officials declared Sept. 22 a "car-free" day, when drivers will be able to park their cars in lots on the outskirts of the city and travel on public buses for free.

A number of new bike lanes on some of the city's streets will also be inaugurated.

president for public policy. Aviv also hopes \$128 million in additional funding will be granted to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for improved processing of immigrants and refugees.

Another issue for Jewish organizations is the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

Unless there is enough support for continuing funding for those organizations that provide victims' services, said Sammie Moshenberg, the National Council of Jewish Women's director of Washington operations, such programs will cease to function on Oct. 1.

Oct. 1 is when the government's fiscal year turns over.

One issue that doesn't need to be fought over any more is the annual foreign aid package to Israel, which is part of a bill that is being worked out by both legislative houses.

The bill includes the full Israel aid package — \$1.98 billion in military and \$840 million in economic funds — with the aid to be distributed as a lump sum when the U.S. fiscal year starts.

Earlier in the year there had been threats in Congress about placing some restrictions on the aid and sending a message to Israel because of a planned Israeli sale of an airborne early warning system to China.

But the sale was eventually canceled.

Congressional lawmakers also have introduced legislation that would block aid to the Palestinians should they follow through on their oft-repeated threat to unilaterally declare statehood on Sept. 13.

While there may not be a major issue to fight against this session, there are a number of bills that include language on charitable choice, which concerns some Jewish groups.

Charitable choice, passed in 1996 as part of welfare reform, allows religious institutions to bid for government social service contracts.

One such bill is the Community Renewal and New Markets Act, which provides funding to low-income communities and money for substance abuse prevention and counseling programs.

The bill, which passed the House easily, allows for religious organizations to participate in such programs without "impairing the religious character of such organizations and without diminishing the religious freedom of program beneficiaries." It also makes a point of saying funding cannot be used for sectarian worship, instruction or proselytization.

Nevertheless, the ADL's Lieberman is concerned about potential religious discrimination.

Lieberman says the bill does not have constitutional safeguards or civil rights protections. □

Hamas militant sentenced to 12 years

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Palestinian court has sentenced a Hamas militant who escaped a botched Israeli attempt to capture him last week to 12 years in jail for setting up an illegal organization, recruiting members and providing them with arms, and public disorder.

Observers suggested the speedy trial of Mahmoud Abu Hanoud was intended to avoid an extradition request by Israel, which holds him responsible for two 1997 suicide attacks in Jerusalem.

During the botched military operation in the West Bank last week, three members of an Israeli undercover unit were killed by "friendly fire."

About 2,000 Palestinians had earlier marched in the West Bank in support of Abu Hanoud.

Israel later arrested four Palestinians suspected of helping Abu Hanoud.

Later in the week, the commander of Israeli forces in the West Bank resigned as a result of the raid.

In addition to Brig. Gen. Shlomo Oren, the leader of the elite Duvdevan unit, which conducted the raid, also resigned. □



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JEWISH WORLD

200 pray at football game

About 200 people at a high school football game in Texas recited the Lord's Prayer, fewer than the number organizers of "spontaneous" prayer sessions at such games had predicted.

Last week, 25,000 people gathered in Asheville, N.C., at a rally calling for the recitation of the prayer at high school games.

The movement comes in response to a Supreme Court decision in June that banned school-approved prayer at public school sporting events.

Judge: Aryan Nations negligent

A U.S. judge ruled that a white supremacist group was negligent in appointing a security director who was known to be unstable.

The ruling against the Aryan Nations paves the way for a jury to assess punitive damages in a case involving two plaintiffs who were shot at and assaulted after stopping in front of the group's Idaho headquarters.

Wartime ship tragedy marked

Jews held a ceremony in Turkey marking the sinking of a ship holding more than 750 Romanian Jews near the Turkish coast during World War II.

Only one person survived the Russian torpedo of the Struma in 1942.

Turkish authorities refused to let the refugees disembark in Istanbul after Britain said it would not let them enter Palestine.

Slave payments may be delayed

Payments to Nazi-era slave and forced laborers from Germany's new \$4.6-billion restitution plan could be delayed until after Jan. 1 due to legal holdups in the United States, said the German firms backing the fund.

A spokesman for the firms said the U.S. judges who were considering three sets of compensation claims were unlikely to finish their work until well into November.

Russian tycoon to sell TV stake

A Russian media tycoon with Jewish roots announced he would transfer his stake in Russia's main national television channel to ORT's management team after pressure from the government.

The move by Boris Berezovsky came after he said he was threatened with the same treatment given to Jewish tycoon Vladimir Goussinsky.

Goussinsky, who owns a rival television channel, is now living abroad after being jailed for three days earlier this year.

A Russian presidential source called Berezovsky's decision "a positive step."

Former Shas leader goes to prison with religious-secular tensions high

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The man who galvanized Israel's working-class Sephardi community into a political force is serving a three-year jail sentence for taking bribes.

Former Shas Party leader Aryeh Deri was surrounded by tens of thousands of supporters when he reported to a prison detention center Sunday.

At a solidarity rally organized at the entrance to the Nitzan detention facility in central Israel, Deri told an estimated crowd of 15,000 to 20,000 supporters that he accepts the jail sentence with love.

"I tell you I will soon enter these walls with a happy heart because I accept with happiness the will of the Holy One, blessed be he," Deri told the crowd.

Deri was ordered by Israel's Supreme Court last week to begin serving a three-year jail sentence for accepting \$60,000 in bribes. The court had rejected his appeal of the conviction and a request to begin serving after the High Holidays, which begin at the end of September.

Deri has insisted he's innocent, claiming his conviction was ethnically motivated. In remarks on Shas radio stations the previous night, Deri reiterated his charge that he is the victim of persecution by the Ashkenazi, left-wing establishment.

"The ruling group had one sacred objective — to put Aryeh Deri in jail," Deri said.

He also claimed that "80 percent of the judges" and prosecutors are supporters of the left-wing Meretz Party.

This message was carried by Shas supporters at the solidarity rally, who waved signs reading "Free Deri" and "The Revolution Will Not Be Stopped." In the skies above them, a counterdemonstration took place in the form of a motorized paraglider that flew over the rally, the words "Number One Thief" written on the sail.

Police were on alert for possible violence by Shas supporters. With the exception of some incidents of rock-throwing at police and journalists, the activists apparently heeded an appeal from leaders of the fervently Orthodox party to act with restraint.

Deri's incarceration was a focal point for social tensions that have simmered throughout the summer. Reflecting the ongoing religious-secular rift in Israeli society, the conflict recently heated up over remarks made by Shas leaders about the Holocaust and attacks on the legal system.

This in turn sparked a secular outcry, including a call by some intellectuals for creation of a Shas-free, secular "New Israel."

In Jerusalem on Sunday, members of kibbutz youth movements held a pro-democracy vigil outside the Supreme Court building.

The tensions also take place against the backdrop of Israeli coalition politics and the faltering peace process. Shas pulled out of the government in July in protest over the Camp David summit, as well as what it termed Prime Minister Ehud Barak's "humiliating" treatment of the party.

Critics of Shas counter that Barak had heeded most of the party's demands. They also note that as the third-largest faction in the Knesset with 17 members, Shas cannot try to present itself as a downtrodden political entity.

Some commentators have suggested that when two other right-wing parties pulled out of the government, Shas preferred not to risk the uncertainty of remaining aligned with peace concessions that would be hard to sell to hawkish party supporters.

In the latest move connected with this issue, the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday approved the dismantling of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the distribution of its power to various government ministries and local authorities.

Acting Religious Affairs Minister Yossi Beilin, who has proposed the idea, said it was intended to separate politics from religious services.

Deri's incarceration raises questions over the political future of Shas, which is divided by internal power struggles between those loyal to Deri and those to party's current leader, Eli Yishai. Yona Deri, the jailed leader's sister-in-law, told Israel Army Radio on Sunday that it was clear Deri would return to some position of leadership after he completes his sentence. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Survivor activist pushes Romania to acknowledge role in Holocaust

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — For years, a section of Romania was the site of a forgotten corner of the Holocaust, a place where hundreds of thousands of Jews were imprisoned and killed during World War II.

Romanian officials tried to sweep the nation's wartime history under the carpet — but they never counted on the determined efforts of 75-year-old Issie Veisfeld.

Some 330,000 Jews — nearly half of Romania's prewar Jewish population — were deported to the region of Transnistria, where they toiled in labor camps from 1941 to 1945.

The Romanians and the Germans created Transnistria. Nazi Germany had promised Romania that it would be given this chunk of the Ukraine after the war to form part of a greater Romania.

Romania's wartime ruler, Gen. Ion Antonescu, had a mixed record when it came to Jews. At the beginning of the war, he allowed the Jews to be deported to Transnistria, but, under pressure from Jewish groups, he later changed this policy.

Subsequent Romanian governments refused to admit any complicity, blaming the virtual extinction of its Jews on the Nazis.

As far as those governments were concerned, "there were no Romanian atrocities, period," says Veisfeld. "They would rather believe that Germany killed 6 million Jews single-handedly.

"But the reality is, between 1941 and 1945, the Romanian gendarmes and the local police" participated in the killing of Jews "at random, without the help of the Nazis. They did a very good job of wiping out Jews without German involvement."

For years, Transnistria was not even included on many of the maps detailing Holocaust death camps.

Veisfeld has been working to change this.

He now lives in Montreal, but hails from the Romanian town of Iasi, whose prewar population of 70,000 was made up mostly of Jews — 47,000 in all. Until the morning of June 29, 1941, Jews lived there relatively undisturbed — at least in comparison to what was happening elsewhere in Europe.

"From the 1700s on, Romanian Jews were tolerated, although we were often beaten and terrorized," said Veisfeld, now 75. "We expected it, but we were used to it and we lived with it."

That day in 1941 — memories of which cause Veisfeld to react noticeably almost 60 years later — began with a message from the local police.

"The local police came to advise everyone to go to the city hall, the Prefectura de Politia, to change their ID cards. Otherwise, we could not go free on the streets without them," he recalls.

"People went out and never came back."

Veisfeld's parents suspected the worst.

From an attic hideout in their home, the boy and his father watched in horror as men and boys were assembled and taken away.

"The authorities closed the gates, mounted machine guns on roofs and shot people," says Veisfeld.

"They went into homes shooting people. Christians said later they never thought they would see anything like this. Some of them helped, but most stayed inside behind locked doors."

Some 6,000 Jews from the town were later put aboard a death train, about 120 to 130 per compartment, he recalls.

"It was a cattle train. There was no air, no water," says Veisfeld. "They kept the train on a dead track for 48 hours, still with no air or water. People drank their own urine and sweat to try to stay alive and they went crazy, beating each other."

The train was then taken to a small village named Podul Iloie, where the dead bodies were unloaded and thrown into common graves.

About 13,000 Jews died as a result of the pogroms in Iasi, according to Radu Ioanid, a historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

To this day, the tenacious survivor, who stayed alive in Iasi's Jewish ghetto because his father was an upholsterer for the military — has been attempting to get the Romanian government to acknowledge the nation's wartime guilt.

Twenty-five years ago, when he was president of the Association of Survivors of Nazi Oppression, Veisfeld called then-President Nicolae Ceausescu at his office and managed to get him on the line.

"I told him we would like him to accept responsibility for the wrongdoing of the Antonescu government," says Veisfeld. "He responded that he could not do that, that he was not an anti-Semite and that he didn't differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. He then said goodbye and hung up."

But Veisfeld was not about to take no for an answer.

"He's unforgiving and never quits," says Henry Ungariano, a Romanian survivor who serves with Veisfeld on the board of the Association of Romanian Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust and has known him for 25 years.

"People want him to quit, especially the current government of Romania. But he won't until he reaches his goal — their admission that they did terrible things to their Jews. I admire Issie one hell of a lot, and I feel sorry for anyone who takes him on."

Veisfeld has for years pressed Romania with a list of demands:

- To erect memorials at all common grave sites where Romanian Jews are buried;
- To implement programs in all Romanian schools that focus on the nation's history of anti-Semitism;
- To acknowledge that Antonescu supported Hitler's plan to exterminate European Jewry;
- To join other nations in instituting restitution programs for Jewish Holocaust survivors.

In May 1998, Veisfeld presented his demands to Romanian President Emil Constantinescu during a meeting in Montreal.

One of his demands was subsequently met: Romania agreed to implement a Holocaust-studies program in its schools.

Veisfeld is now pressing on with his other demands, particularly securing restitution for Jewish property confiscated under the Antonescu regime.

Veisfeld was in Romania earlier this summer to meet with government ministers. He also met with Dr. Nicolae Cajal, president of the Bucharest Jewish community, who asked if Veisfeld could send the community a badly needed ambulance.

Veisfeld is currently trying to fulfill the request — but there was another that he will not accede to.

"Dr. Cajal also asked if I would move there and take over when he retired," says Veisfeld.

"But I have no desire to live there again." □