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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel opposes U.N. force

Israel reiterated its opposition to stationing any international force in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak made his comments Monday in response to reports that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is again raising the possibility of U.N. peacekeepers serving in the territories.

The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to discuss the idea at a closed-door session Wednesday.

U.N. official to tour Middle East

The U.N. high commissioner for human rights is slated to begin a visit to the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Wednesday to investigate the violence there that has killed more than 170 people during the past five weeks.

Mary Robinson, who hopes to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during her weeklong trip, has come under criticism from Jewish watchdog groups for siding against Israel in controversies in the Middle East.

Soldiers' families arrive in N.Y.

The families of three Israeli soldiers abducted into Lebanon last month by the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah arrived in New York to highlight the plight of their sons.

The families plan to meet with American politicians and to speak before the United Nations.

Syrian infiltrator arrested

Israeli security forces arrested a Syrian man who had sneaked into the Jewish state.

Israel Radio said the forces found two knives on the man.

He reportedly told investigators he wanted to help the Palestinian uprising.

Finland sorry for extraditing Jews

Finland officially apologized to the country's Jewish community for extraditing eight Jews to Nazi Germany during World War II.

Paavo Lipponen made the apology at a commemoration in Helsinki marking the 58th anniversary of the event.

In general, Finland protected its 2,000 Jewish nationals during World War II.

ELECTIONS 2000

Jews watch school voucher issue in Michigan and California

By Gayle Horwitz

WASHINGTON (JTA) — California and Michigan are not just high-stakes states for presidential hopefuls.

Jewish groups, teachers and education reformers there are also focusing on their school voucher ballot initiatives.

"The school choice movement has had a hard time coming together to push nationally," said Dane Waters, president of the Initiative and Referendum Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational resource organization, based in Washington. "Passage in either state will definitely bring the movement together."

Vouchers would give federal money to parents who choose to send their children to a different private or parochial school.

The voucher issue, which opponents say violates the separation between church and state, is one of several ballot measures of interest to Jewish voters this season.

A handful of other initiatives deal with the civil rights of gays and lesbians and restrictions on abortion.

According to a poll by Zogby International conducted between Dec. 14, 1999 and Feb. 7, 2000, 61 percent of Jews are pro-choice on the abortion issue.

Jews are more divided over vouchers.

Some Jews who support vouchers see them as a possible way of making Jewish day school education more affordable. Others believe that vouchers unconstitutionally direct state money to religious purposes.

Voucher programs have been enacted in Milwaukee, Cleveland, Florida and Maine.

The Ohio Supreme Court struck down the Cleveland system last year, citing the separation of church and state, but the state legislature enacted a similar program the following June. Unlike the Cleveland and Milwaukee programs, the Maine program has not allowed voucher money to go to religious schools.

State courts have heard challenges to each of the programs, but the U.S. Supreme Court has yet to rule directly on a voucher case.

In Michigan and California, groups on both sides of the issue are spending millions on their campaigns, said Waters, who calls vouchers "the No. 1 state issue" this year.

In California, voters will be asked to approve a measure that would give every child a \$4,000 voucher.

The Michigan measure would offer \$3,300 "opportunity scholarships" to students in school districts that graduate less than two-thirds of their students.

Both proposals claim to save their states money, as well as eventually improve conditions of their public school systems.

Opponents argue that vouchers systems will give states less incentive to put time and resources into fixing ailing public schools.

About \$70 million will go into the California initiative, and another \$30 million will be spent in Michigan.

Much of the money opposing the measures comes from teachers' unions committed to defeating the propositions, though pro-voucher forces have their own money backers.

These include Amway President Dick DeVos and his wife, Betsy, in California, and billionaire venture capitalist Tim Draper in Michigan.

If either measure passes, Waters expects it will be close.

"Vouchers are never successful at the ballot box," he said, adding that teachers'

MIDEAST FOCUS

Rabin assassin has no regrets

Yitzhak Rabin's assassin said his only regret is that he did not kill the Israeli prime minister before the Oslo peace accords with the Palestinians were signed.

Yigal Amir spoke to the media before a court hearing on the state's request to keep the right-wing nationalist, who assassinated Rabin on Nov. 4, 1995, separate from other jail prisoners.

Two wounded settlers recovering

Two Jewish settlers were wounded in a shooting attack near a West Bank settlement on Sunday evening.

A male settler is in serious but stable condition in Hadassah Medical Center — Ein Kerem in Jerusalem, while the other, a woman, was released after being treated.

The woman is the wife of one of the medics who helped treat the victims.

Report: Electoral reform wanted

Israeli legislators in the Likud and Labor parties are renewing efforts to pass legislation to cancel the law for the direct election of the prime minister, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported.

According to the paper, Prime Minister Ehud Barak is even considering reversing his position and backing the initiative.

The report said the primary opponents to the campaign are smaller political parties who benefit from the current electoral system.

Psychic bent out of shape

An Israeli psychic is suing Nintendo for allegedly basing an evil Pokemon character after him.

Uri Geller, who claims he can bend spoons with his mind, is making the claim because the Pokemon character, Yun Geller, carries a spoon and gives his victims bad headaches.

unions are often effective at creating doubt about the propositions.

Though perhaps one of the most well-funded, the school voucher issue isn't the only initiative that is drawing attention this election season.

Initiatives to ban same-sex marriage await voters in Nebraska and Nevada. Supported heavily by the Mormon and Catholic churches, the groups are hoping to chalk up victories in these conservative states, Waters said.

He expects the measures will likely pass, as similar ones did earlier this year in California, and in at least 30 other states since 1995.

In Oregon, gay rights activists have also been campaigning against a proposition to ban the discussion of homosexuality in public schools.

Opponents fear that beyond promoting intolerance, the law could lead to a lack of sex- and AIDS-related education in the schools.

Supporters, including the Christian Coalition and several other church-related groups, said they are trying to give parents greater control over what their children learn. Of the 204 ballot measures approved for 42 states this November, only one relates to abortion. A Colorado initiative seeks to require women seeking abortions to wait 24 hours, after receiving state-approved information about abortion alternatives, before they can undergo the procedure. A Denver Post poll this month found 56 percent of registered voters favored the measure and 35 percent opposed it.

Two other measures to restrict abortions were narrowly defeated in the state in 1998. Other ballot measures to watch include a vote on physician-assisted suicide in Maine, background checks at gun shows in Colorado and Oregon and bilingual education in Arizona. □

Israel's foreign minister predicts a return to talks

By Mark J. Joffe

NEW YORK (JTA) — Now is the "moment of truth for Palestinians to decide if they want an agreement" with Israel, the Jewish state's foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, said during a visit here last week.

But what if the Palestinians decide they really do not want an agreement with Israel if it means making painful compromises on Jerusalem?

President Clinton is scheduled to meet at the White House with Yasser Arafat on Thursday and next Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. But if he fails to put together a formula to restart the peace talks, the Palestinian leader may unilaterally declare an independent state — as early as next week.

And how will Israel respond if Arafat does declare a state, with no prospect for resuming the peace talks anytime soon?

"We will have to respond by disengaging" and setting up a "flexible line of defense" to protect Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Ben-Ami told reporters at a special briefing for the Jewish media here last Friday, a day after Barak appointed him permanent Israeli foreign minister. "We're not going to annex every part of the West Bank," he said. But the Israeli army will set up "defensive blocs" to protect the settlements.

On the other hand, if the peace talks do somehow get restarted, what is the likelihood that a settlement can be achieved, given the violence of the past two months?

Is there any hope of reaching an agreement on Jerusalem, given the hardening of positions on both sides in the wake of Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon's controversial visit to the Temple Mount and the Palestinians' destruction of Jewish holy sites in Nablus and Jericho?

Given what has happened, Ben-Ami told reporters, it "sounds unrealistic, perhaps even surrealistic" to believe that the two sides can strike an agreement on Jerusalem. But he said, "we need to believe that there is a possibility" for a settlement.

"There is a crisis of confidence and trust with the parties," the foreign minister said. "There needs to be a process of mutual healing."

That does not mean the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have to become friends. "This process is not about love, it's about peace," he said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

French Jew blasts premier

The leader of a group representing France's secular Jews told his country's prime minister that France has a one-sided approach toward the Middle East.

"The least we should expect from our own French leaders is they should listen to and try to understand what Israel's representatives have to say," Henri Hajdenberg said to Lionel Jospin at a banquet held Saturday for CRIF, a Jewish umbrella organization.

Israel accepts rescuers' relatives

The children and grandchildren of non-Jews who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust will be able to work in Israel for up to two years.

Israel Radio reported that the decision by Israel's Interior Ministry was taken after several descendants of Righteous Gentiles were detained in Israel as illegal workers.

Project targets blacks, Jews

A new project is trying to improve black-Jewish relations on U.S. college campuses.

The program, which is sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, features dialogue centered around a new PBS documentary, "From Swastika to Jim Crow."

Panel: Yahoo! can block access

Yahoo! can block French Internet users from accessing Nazi items on its auction sites, a panel of experts recommended to a French court.

The panel was charged with coming up with a solution to block the items in response to a petition by anti-racist groups to enforce a French ban on the sale and trading of Nazi objects.

The court is expected to rule on the issue later this month.

Queen visits wounded Jew

England's Queen Elizabeth visited a Jewish man stabbed on a bus in London in mid-October in an incident believed to be related to the violence in the Middle East.

An Algerian man is charged with attempted murder in the attack on David Myers, 20, who was stabbed more than 20 times.

Myers is now recovering at home.

Australian shul attacked

Prayer shawls were set afire during an arson at a synagogue in Sydney, Australia.

The Nov. 1 blaze at the Roscoe Street Shule was the most serious of at least three anti-Semitic incidents reported in Australia last week.

ELECTIONS 2000

Jewish vote could make, break candidates in a number of states

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With a presidential race as close as this year's contest, anything could swing the election.

Like other ethnic groups, Jewish observers believe the Jewish vote could be a decisive factor in picking a new president.

Several hotly contested states with large electoral votes also have large Jewish populations. Florida has one of the largest Jewish constituencies in the country (637,000 people), and the state's 25 electoral votes are currently up for grabs.

Democratic pollster Mark Mellman said the race in Florida could decide the presidency, and it is a state where the Jewish vote is highly organized and is likely to favor Democrat Al Gore over Republican George W. Bush.

Many of the senior citizen communities in South Florida have a hierarchy of building captains and floor captains, who work to try and get out the coveted senior citizen vote in that state. "There is a long-standing relationship with Al Gore and Jewish communities," Mellman said.

And the presence of a Jewish vice presidential candidate may produce a larger turnout among senior citizens, he said. "Everywhere, it's a question of how big is the margin and what is the turnout," he said.

That is the case in Pennsylvania, where Jews are 2.4 percent of the population, and the candidates are neck and neck for 23 electoral votes. Because Jews vote at a higher rate than other ethnic groups, that adds to the weight of their coalition, Mellman said.

Ohio is another undecided state with a large number of electoral votes (21) and a substantial Jewish population (144,000 people). But other states with a large Jewish presence, including New York, New Jersey and California, are tilting toward Gore. □

A numerical guide to the elections

Compiled by JTA's Washington Bureau

59%	Jews who identify as Democrats
9%	Jews who identify as Republicans
30%	Jews who identify as Independents
78%	Jews who voted for Bill Clinton in 1996
16%	Jews who voted for Bob Dole in 1996
3%	Jews who voted for Ross Perot in 1996
80%	Jews who voted for Bill Clinton in 1992
11%	Jews who voted for George Bush in 1992
9%	Jews who voted for Ross Perot in 1992
11	number of Jews now in the U.S. Senate
5	number of Jews now seeking Senate seats
1	number of Jewish senators retiring (Frank Lautenberg)
23	number of Jews now in the U.S. House of Representatives
44	number of Jews now seeking House seats
2	number of House races where 2 Jewish candidates face each other

Jewish Web sites try to guard their virtual doors from hackers

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish organizations are beefing up security on their Web sites this week after the leading pro-Israel lobby's cyber home was hacked.

The Web site of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was broken into Nov. 1 by the Pakistani Hackerz Club, which grabbed e-mail addresses and credit card information from supporters.

The attack came amid evidence that cyberspace has become the latest battleground in the Middle East crisis.

Now other Jewish groups are reviewing their Web sites' security.

The Anti-Defamation League believes it can avoid a similar security breach.

"We see this as an ongoing process," said ADL Webmaster David Hoffman.

"We're trying to stay ahead of the hackers."

Many Jewish organizations have been vigilant in security efforts to prevent hate crimes and vandalism in their offices.

That extra effort is now being utilized online.

Phil Baum, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said his Web site is less vulnerable because it does not deal with credit card numbers online.

"We are immune from this kind of attack because there is no incentive" to hack, Baum said.

The AJCongress has notified its server provider of the Internet attack.

Hoffman said the ADL contacted AIPAC to find out how the attack happened, in hopes of learning how to prevent a similar invasion. "There are fundamental differences in the way we approach" Web sites, Hoffman said. "We think we've come up with a good and secure solution."

AIPAC spokesman Ken Bricker said the organization's site would remain down until the group can establish new security measures.

The hackers were able to access two databases — one that contained an e-mail list of people who receive daily news items and another that contained credit card information of people who had recently registered with AIPAC online.

The organization will investigate Internet security in order to determine whether to continue asking for credit card numbers online.

"We need to determine just how useful the Web is," Bricker said.

Although Jewish organizations are awakened to the possibility of online attack, Baum said the fear would not cause them to shut down their virtual homes.

The hackers are "not going to scare us into taking down our Web site," Baum said. "It would be giving them a credit they don't deserve."

Web sites for the Israeli government and Israel Defense Force were targeted by hackers in the past couple of weeks.

In some instances, access to Internet providers whose servers host the sites was disrupted, while in other cases, the assault caused the sites themselves to crash. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Reform Judaism lauded for work in former Soviet Union

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — In 1985, Jews launched the Reform movement in the Soviet Union under a shroud of secrecy.

"We organized an underground gathering to celebrate the Jewish New Year because people did not want to go to the state-controlled synagogue. We had no shofar and I took a deer horn" and "drilled and sawed it myself," Reform Jewish leader Rabbi Zinovy Kogan told JTA.

As Reform Jewish leaders from across the former Soviet Union gathered with their compatriots from around the world last week in a spacious Moscow hotel to celebrate 10 years of "official" progressive Judaism, as Reform Judaism is known in much of the world, they had no such problem. Now, there is no need to worship clandestinely — and the Reform movement, particularly since the fall of communism in 1991, has spread across the former Soviet Union.

There are now more than 90 congregations across the former Soviet Union, according to Kogan, mainly in Russia and Ukraine.

Their efforts are being recognized. When the longtime Orthodox chief rabbi of Russia, Adolph Shayeveich, told the Reform delegation, "We can't rebuild Russian Jewry without you," the response was enthusiastic.

"We have never heard such a sympathetic statement from a chief rabbi of any country. We welcome Shayeveich's wisdom in appreciating that without progressive Judaism there is no world Jewry and no possibility to recreate Russian Jewish life," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, the executive director of ARZA/World Union, the umbrella organization for Reform Jewry in the United States.

But freedom and growth have brought their share of problems.

A lack of qualified rabbis is one. It is difficult, said Austin Beutel, the president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, to persuade rabbis and other Western-trained Jewish professionals to move to Russia and lead a community.

In an effort to solve this problem, last fall in Moscow the movement opened an institution for training social workers and community leaders, headed by Chaim Ben-Yaakov, a Russian-born progressive rabbi. The next step is under discussion — opening a rabbinical seminary in Moscow similar to the one run by the Conservative movement in Hungary.

But even then the problem of keeping the graduates in Russia will remain.

While Reform leaders say they have great respect for Chabad-Lubavitch, the fervently Orthodox organization, the two groups are at odds in communities across Russia — usually over the return of synagogue buildings and other communal Jewish property.

But Jeannetta Vishnevskaya, the leader of the Progressive Judaism community in the Far Eastern city of Magadan, a former center of the Soviet Gulag, does not care about the intra-Jewish squabble.

Vishnevskaya, who counts 70 members in her community, has to confront another problem: the extremely low temperatures that make it difficult to organize Jewish events — and for members to attend them. □