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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Mideast talks at 'opportune time'

President Clinton met with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators Wednesday to discuss how to stop the Middle East violence and resume peace negotiations.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who participated in the meeting, said afterward that this may be an "opportune time" for the two sides to reach a peace accord. Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami was optimistic after the talks. "These were very, very serious negotiations with a spirit that may lead to the conclusion of an agreement if we maintain the same spirit throughout," he said.

Peres pursues candidacy

Former Israeli Premier Shimon Peres began contacting legislators to collect the 10 signatures necessary to declare his candidacy for prime minister.

Peres said Wednesday his candidacy will depend on the support of the secular Meretz Party.

He also said he would withdraw his candidacy if an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is reached by the time President Clinton leaves office on Jan. 20. Israeli elections for prime minister are scheduled for Feb. 6.

Bush again OKs charitable choice

At a meeting with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders Wednesday, President-elect George W. Bush reiterated his support for faith-based organizations to take a lead role in running social welfare programs.

"We're not going to fund churches, just the services that the churches perform," Bush said, according to Murray Friedman of the American Jewish Committee, who was among a few Jewish leaders in attendance. Friedman, who is working with a number of religious groups to study the charitable choice issue, conveyed to Bush the concerns of some in the Jewish community about religious intrusion in the public arena.

Gaza battle rages five hours

Israeli troops fought a five-hour battle with Palestinian gunmen in the southern Gaza Strip near the Egyptian border. At least one Palestinian died in the fighting, and some 40 were wounded.

An Israeli army spokesman said a crowd of about 300 Palestinian civilians came to watch the Rafah gun battle and some may have been hit by stray bullets.

Colleges struggle to balance risks, value of study in Israel

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The recent Palestinian violence and the resulting U.S. State Department warning against travel to Israel is causing many American universities to rethink their support for study in Israel.

That issue came to the fore this month as George Washington University first decided not to give credit to students studying abroad at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, then quickly reversed course under pressure.

Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania also considered denying credit for study at Israeli universities. Ultimately they dropped their plans following complaints from Jewish groups on campus.

On the West Coast, the 23-campus California State University system canceled its program with Hebrew University in October, leaving 11 students who already had signed housing contracts in Israel for the semester to face the loss of academic credit and tuition subsidies.

Nine of the students nevertheless decided to stay in Israel.

The wrangling comes as the number of American students planning to study in Israel next semester is decreasing.

Officials at Tel Aviv and Hebrew universities both acknowledged that applications were significantly down for the spring semester, though neither would disclose details. Most students enrolled for the current semester chose to remain in Israel despite the current unrest, both schools said.

Israel is the most popular destination for American Jews studying abroad, and approximately 3,300 American students studied in Israel during the 1998-99 school year, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Approximately 450 Americans are currently enrolled at Hebrew University, whose program for overseas students is the largest in Israel.

The policy at George Washington, a private university in Washington, was unusual in that it specifically denied credit from Hebrew University. This is because Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus is in "east Jerusalem," an area singled out for special caution in the travel warning, university officials said.

Beyond its geographical connotations, "east Jerusalem" generally refers to areas of the city that were under Jordanian control until the Six-Day War in 1967, and which the Palestinians seek to make the capital of their own state. The area has a large Arab population.

Israeli officials and American Jewish leaders argue that Mount Scopus has been an Israeli enclave since 1948, and is safe. Their discussions with George Washington University officials led the university to reverse its policy.

The school will continue to accept credits earned at Hebrew University. However, according to a statement released by its director of summer, special and international programs, the university now tells students that if they do not heed State Department warnings "they are acting entirely on their own, without the sanction of the University."

"Our highest priority is always the safety and well-being of our students," the statement said. "We can not ignore publicly available information that establishes norms for risk in travel. We make every effort to bring such information to the attention of our students and their families, and to ensure that they read and understand it."

The debate at the colleges reflects their fear of being held liable should their students be harmed while studying in Israel. Some universities have resolved the matter

MIDEAST FOCUS

Court rules on draft exemptions

Israel's High Court of Justice rejected a request to grant the Knesset an additional three months to deal with the issue of draft exemptions granted to yeshiva students.

The current draft exemptions, which were declared illegal by the court, expired earlier this month. The court said the Knesset has failed to deal with the matter because of political considerations.

Anti-terror squads nab suspects

Acting on intelligence information it received, Israeli anti-terror squads raided several apartments in the Tel Aviv area looking for Palestinians suspected of planning to carry out terrorist attacks.

Several Palestinians who were in Israel illegally were detained for questioning.

Reform member to join council

A member of the Reform movement was elected along with 10 other representatives to the Tel Aviv religious council, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Tuesday's election of Noa Nir Feinstein marks the first time in years that the council includes a non-Orthodox member. The secular Meretz Party tried several years ago to present a Reform woman as its candidate to the Tel Aviv council, which responded by refusing to convene for nearly a year.

Mossad agent freed from jail

A Mossad agent convicted of providing false reports to superiors that threatened to bring Israel and Syria to the brink of war was released from prison after three years in jail.

A third of Yehuda Gil's sentence was commuted for good behavior. Gil, 65, was convicted of falsifying reports and keeping Mossad payments intended for his supposed Syrian source.



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by asking students and their parents to sign a waiver absolving the university of liability. In addition, some are dropping official partnerships with Israeli universities, which means that students can still receive credit for course work, but they do so solely under the auspices of the Israeli university.

That was the case with Cal State, although unlike the moves under consideration at other schools — which would have affected only students applying for the spring 2001 semester — the Cal State action stranded students already in Israel.

Also, unlike the East Coast schools, Cal State so far has resisted pressure from Jewish groups unhappy with its decision.

The California State University system is on the second rung of the state's three-tier master plan for public higher education, below the University of California system. The University of California is continuing its overseas studies program in Israel.

Leo van Cleve, director of international programs at Cal State University headquarters in Long Beach, Calif., noted that Cal State has study abroad programs with some 50 foreign universities.

In the past, similar cancellations were ordered only twice — both in Israel — during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1991 Gulf War, he said.

Van Cleve suggested that the cancellation would stand for the upcoming spring semester, but that the situation would be reconsidered in early 2001.

Menachem Milson, provost of Hebrew University's Rothberg School for Overseas Students, said that since the violence began in late September "more than two or three" American universities have cut their official ties with his program.

The American students "stay at their personal responsibility and Hebrew University's responsibility, as opposed to the American universities seeing themselves as liable," Milson said in a telephone interview.

That approach satisfies Orli Gil, Israeli consul for academic affairs in New York, and Richard Joel, president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

Both say that studying in Israel is perfectly safe, despite the travel advisory.

(Tom Tugend in Los Angeles contributed to this story) □

Dutch who saved Jews from Nazis honored in L.A. as Righteous Gentiles

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — "I don't feel like a hero," 91-year old Annie Schipper said. "I did what I had to do."

What Annie and her husband Pieter "had to do" in 1942 was hide a young Jewish couple with a baby son in their small apartment in Amsterdam, at the risk of their own lives.

For their bravery and humanity, Mrs. Schipper and her late husband, as well as a second Dutch family, were honored Dec. 14 as "Righteous Among the Nations" by local Israeli diplomats and the American Society for Yad Vashem.

Schipper, now a resident of Santa Barbara, Calif., was joined on the stage at Sephardi Temple Tifereth Israel by the young mother she had saved, Leah Lopes Diaz Van den Brink, and her now middle-aged son, Wulfert.

Mrs. Van den Brink recalled one heart-stopping day, when the Schipper house — partially rented by a barber with a German clientele — was surrounded by a cordon of German and Dutch police, looking for a friend of the Schippers active in the anti-Nazi underground.

As the police approached the door where the Van den Brink family was hiding, Annie Schipper yelled at them in the barking tone often employed by the Germans, "Goddamn, if you want to enter this room, go upstairs and ask your friend the barber's permission, because the room is full of his stuff."

The police were so astonished by the outburst that they left without searching the room.

Honored posthumously with the scroll and medal of Yad Vashem were Josef (Jupp) Herinx, who in 1943 founded clandestine foster homes for Jewish children in his hometown of Kerkrade, Holland, and his mother Theresa. □

JEWISH WORLD

Law aids elderly Jewish patients

As a result of new U.S. legislation, elderly Jews enrolled in managed health care programs will now be able to return to their nursing homes after hospitalization.

The new legislation, which corrects a gap in public policy, will allow Jewish patients to heal in facilities that comply with dietary laws and holiday observances, said Diana Aviv, vice president for public policy for United Jewish Communities, which lobbied on the issue.

The legislation was included in a spending bill passed last Friday.

Ad blames P.A. for child 'martyrs'

"Who Is Making 'Martyrs' of Palestinian Children?" asks an ad run by the American Jewish Committee in Wednesday's New York Times.

"Ask the Palestinians," the ad says, accusing the Palestinian Authority of using "lessons of hate" and other methods to make willing martyrs of their children.

"Palestinian leaders owe their people and the world an answer," the ad concludes.

Quebec premier decries racism

Quebec's premier criticized a hard-line separatist's recent comments about Jews and immigrants. "No democracy has room for those kinds of comments, when we understand that genocide negates the very notion of humanity," Lucien Bouchard said Tuesday.

He spoke out after Yves Michaud, a former member of the Quebec legislature, said at public meetings and on radio over the past two weeks that Jewish people believe they were the only ones to have suffered in the world's history.

He also called members of B'nai Brith "extremists," and blamed immigrants for the failure of Quebec's 1995 referendum on independence from Canada.

Charge filed in 'Mein Kampf' case

Czech state prosecutors brought charges against an Internet site owner who offered to sell Czech translations of Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

Vit Varak is accused of promoting movements that seek to suppress human rights. Earlier this month, a Czech publisher of Hitler's anti-Semitic manifesto was convicted on similar charges and given a three-year suspended sentence with a \$50,000 fine.

Jerusalem patriarch dies at 77

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch for Jerusalem, Diodoros I, died at the age of 77.

The Associated Press reported that he died in a hospital after suffering from liver ailments related to diabetes. Diodoros served in the position for 19 years.

Russian Jews alarmed by arrest of leader, but pledge to persevere

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The activities of one of Russian Jewry's largest groups will continue despite the arrest of one of the community's main financiers, a leader of the group said.

Some Jewish activists had predicted the quick collapse of the Russian Jewish Congress as pressure on the business empire of RJC President Vladimir Goussinsky increased during the past year.

But even after Goussinsky's arrest in Spain last week, Alexander Osovtsov, the RJC's vice president, said the group's major projects would continue.

While the arrest appears to be motivated more by the Kremlin's desire to control Russian media outlets than by anti-Semitism, Russian Jews — and Jewish leaders abroad — are concerned.

"Goussinsky has become a symbol of the Jewish movement for the whole country. The fact that he is officially ostracized this way may mean a 'go-ahead' sign for anti-Semites here," said Natasha Liberman, a Jewish university student who lives near Moscow.

Last Friday, Russian officials took additional steps against Goussinsky. Moscow tax authorities announced they would seek to liquidate several of his companies, including his flagship NTV television station, and the Prosecutor General's Office said it would seize his property in Spain as part of its bid to have Goussinsky extradited to Russia on fraud charges.

NTV's supporters, headed by former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, issued a statement saying the liquidation suit has dispelled any last doubts about the political character of Goussinsky's case.

"The persecution of Vladimir Goussinsky, who did so much for the uniting of the Jewish community of Russia, is sheer nonsense and misunderstanding," agreed Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, the leader of the umbrella Congress of Religious Organizations of Russia.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking in Cuba, said he had no reason to question the prosecutor general's actions.

"He is accused of fraud, and what has been happening to him and what will be happening in the future is up to law enforcement organs and the courts," Putin said.

The arrest of Goussinsky, a prominent critic of the Kremlin's military action against Muslim separatists in Chechnya, is the latest blow against the media magnate.

Goussinsky was jailed briefly in June on embezzlement charges, but then released and allowed to leave the country. He later said that while in jail he had been pressured to hand the NTV station to the state.

Goussinsky reportedly owed \$200 million to Gazprom, Russia's natural gas monopoly. According to some reports, the state hoped to take over the station as repayment for Goussinsky's debts.

Since July he has been living with his family in London and at his villa in a luxury resort in southern Spain. Some of Goussinsky's friends warned him that he was not safe in Spain, particularly after Interpol, acting on a request by Russian authorities, called for his arrest.

When four Spanish police officers arrived at his villa to arrest him, Goussinsky reportedly told them: "You are making a big mistake. You don't know who I am. I am a friend of Bill Clinton's."

But the Spanish judge who is handling the case, pending a Spanish court's decision on extraditing Goussinsky to Russia, may not be impressed by his name-dropping. After all, Baltazar Garzon last made media headlines when he ordered the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

Meanwhile, international Jewish groups are working to rally world opinion on Goussinsky's behalf.

Several Jewish groups asked Spain's Ministry of Justice to release Goussinsky.

The U.S. State Department said it would monitor the case. □

106th Congress had mixed record on key Jewish issues, groups find

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In the middle of the night, it seems, Congress slipped away and left many issues undone, including appropriating millions of dollars in special aid for Israel.

After the all-consuming controversy over the presidential election, few seemed to notice that Congress adjourned and left a number of contentious issues for the next legislative session, when the Senate and House will be even more closely divided.

Jewish organizations enjoyed a few successes during the 106th Congress, but endured many disappointments and face uncertain prospects on some of the more difficult issues.

Israel's annual foreign aid package can be counted as one of last year's appropriations successes, as the entire request of nearly \$3 billion was approved despite diplomatic fallout over Israel's proposed sale of an early-warning radar system to China.

The White House also sent Capitol Hill a last-minute request for an additional \$450 million in military aid, primarily to help defray the cost of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon last May. Under different circumstances the request might have been somewhat routine, but the package came under greater scrutiny because of political instability in Israel and the continuing violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Ultimately, a combination of poor timing and a cut in the American defense budget resulted in the package's defeat, a Jewish official familiar with the aid request said.

Jewish groups also had hoped to see passage of an immigration bill, one of the issues that held up the budget. The bill would have restored certain benefits to immigrants — such as Medicaid and eligibility for food stamps — taken away by 1996 welfare reform laws. In the end, the effort failed.

In addition, a large-scale amnesty for undocumented immigrants failed to make the final version of the omnibus spending bill. Organizations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society that had hoped for a dramatic shift will have to settle for modest changes in the processing of undocumented immigrants who have resided in the United States for at least 15 years. A more sweeping change would have been of greater help to Jews from the former Soviet Union, among other immigrants.

Compromise language in the omnibus bill did give undocumented immigrants on the verge of getting a green card a four-month window to obtain the work permit in the United States, rather than having to get it in their home countries.

In addition, Congress gave the State Department \$700 million — \$42 million more than the administration had requested — to bring in and process refugees and to aid refugees abroad.

Hate crimes legislation did not make it into the spending bill, though it had been strongly promoted by the Clinton administration. Jewish groups were disappointed by the failure of the legislation, which would have authorized federal prosecution of crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender or disability, expanding current laws that protect victims of crimes motivated by race, color, religion or ethnicity.

The Senate passed hate crimes legislation in June, but the measure was stripped from a defense bill because of objections from the Republican leadership in the House.

Groups like the Anti-Defamation League saw the lame-duck session as a chance to pass the hate crimes legislation, but an expected last-minute surge of support from the White House never materialized.

Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the ADL, said the presidential election controversy overshadowed any chance for progress on hate crimes.

He believes that more members of Congress will support hate crimes legislation next year, but the leadership will oppose it and the Bush administration is not likely to support the bill as aggressively as the Clinton administration did.

Jewish groups also had looked to stave off provisions for charitable choice, which allows religious institutions to bid for government social service contracts. However, language allowing for charitable choice was included in both health and urban development legislation.

Some Jewish groups fear it will be difficult to stop moves toward charitable choice under the new president, since Bush strongly supports the issue.

"We have our work cut out for us," Lieberman said.

One victory for the Jewish community was the passage of legislation that allows elderly Jews enrolled in managed health care programs to return to their health care home community after hospitalization.

An interfaith coalition of faith-based health care providers, run through the United Jewish Communities' Washington Action Office, seized on the "Return to Home" issue, worrying that managed care organizations were building closed groupings of health care providers and excluding facilities not on their provider lists, including many Jewish homes.

"The result for Jewish patients is that they will be able to heal in community skilled nursing facilities that comply with dietary laws, holiday observances and other essential religious or cultural practices that are central to their mental and spiritual well being," said Diana Aviv, vice president for public policy of UJC, which lobbied hard on the issue.

Aviv said the success of that legislation, together with the congressional focus on Social Security and Medicare reform, makes UJC confident that Congress will make serving seniors a priority next session.

At this point, however, most Jewish groups are withholding judgment on the outlook for the next session, which begins in early January.

Much of the talk in Washington is about bipartisanship, but Vice-President-elect Dick Cheney said Sunday that Bush does not intend to relent on his agenda.

Jewish organizations, meanwhile, plan to push their own agendas, or at least modest proposals that should get support from both sides of the aisle.

Reva Price, Washington representative of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said her group will "hope for the best" for its efforts to increase the minimum wage and pass a patient's bill of rights and prescription drug plan.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee said it will lobby again for the supplemental aid package, and will press to keep sanctions in place against Iran and Iraq.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society hopes to get benefits restored next year to elderly refugees, and ease legalization efforts for long-term immigrants. □