



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Terror groups meet in Tehran

Palestinian terror groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah, gathered in Tehran to coordinate their strategies against Israel. Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader in Lebanon, told the gathering Tuesday, that Israel should expect "surprise attacks by Palestinian resistance groups."

Israel sees bin Laden connection

Billionaire terrorist Osama bin Laden is trying to establish a "terrorist" infrastructure among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Ra'anana Gissin made the charge Tuesday after Israel arrested a Gaza lawyer it suspects of involvement with bin Laden, whose terror operations are based in Afghanistan.

Charitable choice blasted

More than 850 religious leaders signed a petition to President Bush and Congress opposing the charitable choice provisions of the president's faith-based initiative.

The clergy members say the provisions would direct tax money to religious organizations to provide social services without proper church-state safeguards. The leaders announced the petition shortly before a U.S. House subcommittee held hearings Tuesday on the constitutionality of current charitable choice programs.

Knicks star apologizes

New York Knicks basketball player Charlie Ward apologized for telling the New York Times Magazine that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

"I will say again that I would never condemn or criticize any group or religion. That is not who I am," he said. Ward also said he will open a "dialogue" with Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, the president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. [Page 3]

Palestinians renew attacks

Palestinians fired three mortars Tuesday at the Gadid settlement in the Gaza Strip. The shells damaged several hothouses, but caused no injuries. There had been a brief respite in mortar shelling after Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat recently called for an end to such attacks.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Concerns arise as journalist prepares to lead umbrella group

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Opposition is mounting to the choice of real estate and media mogul Mortimer Zuckerman as the next chairman of the powerful Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

A seven-member nominating committee selected Zuckerman from a field of eight candidates on April 19.

But the growing anxiety about who will serve as the community's most visible and influential spokesman comes as American Jews are battling to defend Israel before Washington, the media and international forums like the United Nations.

At least one prominent Conference member — Rabbi Eric Yoffie of the Reform movement — says he will vote against Zuckerman. Several other members also are tilting that way.

That is a highly unusual development for an organization like the Conference, which has traditionally rubber-stamped the nominating committee's choice for chairman.

The election meeting will be held in late May, just before current Chairman Ronald Lauder's two-year term expires.

Zuckerman still seems assured of a majority of the vote. Yet some suggest that the resistance of a significant faction would embarrass the Conference and, potentially, hobble the chairman.

Ironically, the issue that torpedoed Zuckerman's first bid for chairman in 1997 — his marriage to a non-Jew — has been superseded by concern over his fortnightly column in U.S. News & World Report, which Zuckerman owns.

Zuckerman often devotes the column to the Middle East conflict, strongly supporting Israeli positions. His respected analyses make him a regular on the pundits' circuit. And Zuckerman's business and media prowess grants him wide access to the corridors of power, a major plus for a Conference chairman.

But with the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians showing little signs of abating, there is concern within the Conference that any public pronouncement by the chairman about Israel, Washington, American foreign policy or similar topics accurately reflect a consensus of the 54-member group.

In this case, the definition of "consensus" is not unlike that of pornography: you know it when you see it.

"I understand the difference between the voice of the Presidents Conference, which has its own views, and when I will be able to express my own editorial views," Zuckerman told JTA.

He pledged that he will not take a hiatus from his column — "that's what I do for a living," Zuckerman said — and it's unclear whether he will cease writing about the Middle East.

"This was discussed fully with the committee, and they will respond as they see fit," Zuckerman said.

Zuckerman's critics say they aim to prevent a repeat of a Jan. 8 incident in Jerusalem, where Lauder addressed a massive rally — without the Conference's consensus approval — in support of an undivided Jerusalem.

Lauder explained he was speaking "as an individual," yet the media identified him as the Conference chairman and portrayed the rally as opposed to the policies of Israel's then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

That event seemed to breach a cardinal rule of the Conference: unequivocal support

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. sees improved atmosphere

The United States believes Israel and the Palestinians are making progress toward a reduction of violence, Secretary of State Colin Powell said during an appearance Monday on PBS.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority held U.S.-sponsored security talks Monday night. The two sides agreed to "make an effort to lower the level of violence and improve security coordination," according to a statement issued by Israel.

Israel, Syria trade barbs at U.N.

Israel and Syria traded charges during a bitter exchange at the end of an all-day debate Monday in the U.N. Security Council about how to protect civilians in war zones. Syria accused Israel of committing genocide against Palestinian civilians while Israel reminded Syria of its massacres against its own people.

Palestinian cop linked to lynching

Israel arrested a Palestinian police officer believed to be involved in the mob lynching of two Israelis last October in Ramallah. The officer is alleged to have led the two to the police station in Ramallah and then allowed the mob to kill them.

Palestinians fire new weapon

Palestinian militants apparently have a new weapon for their attacks on Israeli motorists driving in the West Bank. The militants fired metal spikes at cars on Monday, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Ailing El Al slashing costs

El Al Israel Airlines is trying to reduce costs as a result of a sharp downturn in tourism to Israel caused by continued Palestinian violence.

Measures announced Tuesday include halting flights to 10 destinations, reducing the airline's workforce and selling eight old planes. Last year, El Al lost an estimated \$109 million.

for every Israeli government. Three weeks later, in a backhanded censure of Lauder, a dozen left-leaning Conference members convinced the membership to formalize a policy on the chairman's behavior.

It is no coincidence that some of those same members are leading the charge against Zuckerman.

"After adopting the policy, the Conference has now decided to turn its back on that policy," said Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Zuckerman will have to sacrifice his "private" persona, Yoffie said.

"There is no private Conference chairman, just as there is no private Abe Foxman" — national director of the Anti-Defamation League — "or Eric Yoffie," Yoffie said.

Mel Salberg, a past Conference chairman and chair of the nominating committee, said Zuckerman had "agreed that he would only express the consensus views of the Conference, and if there were no consensus, then he would not take a view on that subject."

Salberg noted that Zuckerman, like every candidate, pledged his unequivocal support for any democratically elected Israeli government.

Nevertheless, several members vowed to demand specifics at the May election meeting.

The question is "what kind of Chinese Wall they will erect to guarantee that what Mort writes is clearly not the view of the Presidents Conference," said Avram Lyon, executive director of the Jewish Labor Committee.

"I don't know how to do that, but anything less than that will lead to some sort of confusion down the line."

The Conference already is often perceived as more hawkish on Israel than the Jewish public. Some wonder whether there would be a comparable outcry if Zuckerman — perceived as conservative and relatively hawkish on Israel — held more dovish views.

But Zuckerman's critics say they are not concerned with his ideology, but with the potential for future snafus like the Lauder incident and for mistaken public perceptions.

Aside from the Middle East, Zuckerman also writes about a wide range of domestic and foreign issues.

When it becomes known that Zuckerman, who also publishes the New York Daily News, is Conference chairman — a post that some dub "the King of the Jews" — each of his columns might be taken as the stance of American Jewry, observers suggest.

Consider his column in the current issue of U.S. News, titled "The Caribou Conundrum." In the piece, Zuckerman argues that it's worth exploring the Bush Administration proposal to drill for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

However, some Jewish environmental groups oppose the Bush proposal. Would that constitute a conflict of interest?

What if Zuckerman wrote about taxes, abortion, school vouchers or President Bush's faith-based initiative? Or on America's relations with Russia or Iran, where the safety of Jewish communities is uncertain.

"Those, too, are relevant issues; not only writing about Israel, but writing about any political issue in America is a relevant issue," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA/World Union. "We'd have to hear more substantive answers before Mr. Zuckerman would gain our support at ARZA."

Some suggest that every one of Zuckerman's future columns could be parsed and challenged.

Almost lost in the furor is Zuckerman's personal life. Zuckerman separated from his wife last year, but some representatives of the Conservative and Orthodox movements are still uneasy that he has not denounced intermarriage per se.

Both movements are opposed to intermarriage, and say the Conference chairman should be a role model for the rest of the community.

The movements' representatives in the Conference, however, indicate that Zuckerman's separation from his wife is sufficient for them, and they will vote for him.

"If he were running for chief rabbi, then we'd have to discuss it," said Rabbi Pesach Lerner, executive vice president of the Orthodox movement's National Council for Young Israel. "I'm not condoning anything, but the Conference is a political body, not a religious body. And I will vote for Mort Zuckerman because of who he is, what his connections are — because that's part of who he is — and for what he will be able to accomplish with us and for us." □



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JEWISH WORLD

ADL: Riots spurred racists

The Anti-Defamation League has found a marked increase in online discussions and postings on racist Web sites as a result of the recent rioting in Cincinnati.

"The haters predictably are using Cincinnati as a rallying call on the Internet to their cohorts or anyone else who will listen," said Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director. "The riots have become a major focus of the online activity of bigots."

U.S. to release CIA Nazi files

U.S. officials are planning on Friday to release 20 CIA files of key Nazis, including Adolf Hitler, Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann.

The files are the first of several hundred related to suspected Nazi criminals that are to be made public.

Bomb damages Kishinev shul

A bomb damaged the outside of a synagogue in Kishinev, Moldova, during the week of Passover.

No one was injured in the attack, which is being investigated by police.

JDC group visits Sarajevo

A delegation from the board of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee met in Sarajevo on Monday with Karlo Filipovic, president of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Filipovic, who took up the leadership post six weeks ago, thanked the JDC for the aid it provided to Bosnia during the 1992-1995 war. The group is visiting JDC projects in Bosnia and Croatia, aides said.

Birthingright seeks grant proposals

A program that offers free Israel trips to young Jews is seeking grant proposals for trips that focus on specific professions or interests, or accommodate physical disabilities.

Birthingright Israel "will award grants only to the most innovative proposals," said Marlene Post, the group's chair. In a separate development, Birthingright Israel is hosting an Israel Independence Day party in New York on Wednesday for the program's alumni.

Refugee rabbi dies at 79

Rabbi Julius Carlebach, who escaped Germany on a Kindertransport and rose to become a leading scholar, died April 17 in England at 79.

Honored by Germany for turning Heidelberg's University for Jewish Studies into the country's leading institution of its kind, Carlebach worked in a wide range of fields.

The rest of his family, including his father, Rabbi Joseph Carlebach, died in the Holocaust.

Knicks guard in foul trouble over comments on Jews, Jesus

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — A New York Knicks basketball player has more to worry about this week than his team's current opponent in the NBA playoffs — despite his apology.

The American Jewish Congress is calling on Florida's secretary of state, Katherine Harris, to bench point guard Charlie Ward as the official spokesman for a state reading program after Ward was quoted in the April 22 edition of *The New York Times Magazine* as saying that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

In an article on the Knicks, Ward also was quoted as saying that Jews are persecuting Christians "every day."

Ward's "comments are hurtful and he needs to be responsible for them. The state needs to be responsible by not associating with him," said Jack Karako, the executive director of the AJCongress' Southeast region.

If Ward is allowed to continue in his role for the "Born to Read" program, it would be "as if the state is endorsing his comments," Karako added.

Harris, who made headlines during last fall's Florida vote recount battle between Al Gore and George W. Bush, has yet to respond to the call.

After Ward was publicly reprimanded by NBA Commissioner David Stern, he apologized in a statement released by the Knicks.

"I want to truly apologize to everybody who was offended by the *New York Times Magazine* story. I will say again that I would never condemn or criticize any group or religion," the statement said.

Ward also agreed to engage in a dialogue with Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, the founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, "in an effort to heal the wounds of the last few days."

Despite the apology, the AJCongress' Karako said Tuesday that his group still is calling to have Ward replaced on the state reading program.

He added that his group would wait to make its next move until after Ward and Eckstein meet.

After the initial comments were published, Ward told reporters that if they want to know the context for his statements, they should read the Bible. He added that his best friend — Jesus — is Jewish.

He further clarified his comments by saying that when he talked about Jews persecuting Christians, he was referring to Jews who denounce family members who convert to Christianity.

The AJCongress wasn't the only Jewish group that criticized the Knicks backup point guard.

Ward's published comments revive the "historic myths that have been the source of anti-Semitism for centuries," the Anti-Defamation League said in a statement last week.

The ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, accepted Ward's apology Tuesday.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center has invited the entire Knicks team to visit the Nazi-hunting group's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. The center is awaiting a response.

In the article, teammate Allan Houston was quoted as defending Ward's statement, while a third teammate suggested the Jewish writer join Jews for Jesus.

Despite the reprimand, Stern said he did not fine Ward — as was done in other incidents in which players, coaches and broadcasters made inappropriate remarks — because the commissioner "did not wish to enhance his sense of martyrdom."

Stern added that Ward "will have to accept the reactions and judgments of fans and all fair-minded people who have been offended."

Knicks' fans booed when Ward took the court for a Sunday playoff game against the Toronto Raptors.

But by the end of the game they were cheering Ward, who helped the Knicks win the first game of the series. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Sharon says 'no talks under fire,'
but talks continue at various levels**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — There was a flurry of Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy this week despite Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's repeated announcement that there would be "no talks under fire."

Amid numerous meetings between Israeli and Palestinian officials at various levels were reports that Israel is ready to consider a proposal for reviving negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The diplomatic feelers, however, alternated with several terror attacks.

On Saturday, Israeli and Palestinian officials met for four hours and agreed to resume limited security cooperation.

A day later, a Palestinian suicide bomber killed a 53-year-old doctor and wounded at least 50 other Israelis when he detonated explosives strapped to his body at a crowded bus stop in Kfar Saba, a Tel Aviv suburb near the border with the West Bank.

On Monday, at least eight Israelis were wounded when a car bomb exploded in Or Yehuda, another Tel Aviv suburb. A brother, 12, and sister, 8, were among the wounded.

Just the same, in a possible indication of the two sides' determination to continue talking, Israel and the Palestinian Authority held another round of U.S.-sponsored security talks Monday night.

The two sides agreed to "make an effort to lower the level of violence and improve security coordination," according to an Israeli statement.

The change in tone was reflected Monday in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, which said Sharon regards a Jordanian-Egyptian initiative to end the violence and resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as "an important point of departure."

That was a far cry from Sharon's previous dismissal of the initiative as unworthy of serious consideration.

Israeli officials stress that the original proposal submitted by Cairo and Amman has been amended to accommodate Israeli reservations.

The proposal now does not impose any preconditions on either Israel or the Palestinians, the officials said.

The initiative calls for the two sides to implement the disengagement and security accord reached last October in Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt. Among its clauses:

- Israel would withdraw troops to the positions held before Palestinian violence erupted last September, lifting its blockades of Palestinian cities.
- The Palestinian Authority would stop inciting violence and clamp down on militant groups.
- Security cooperation would resume, and eventually the diplomatic dialogue would resume as well.
- The two sides would not be required to resume peace negotiations from the point reached under former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, an earlier Palestinian demand that Sharon continues to reject.

While the terms of the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative have become more palatable to Israel, they nonetheless require Sharon to abandon his condition that Palestinian violence cease completely before negotiations can resume.

Political observers say Sharon's apparent shift is the result of

pressure from the United States and the international community.

The vigorous public intervention last week by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who demanded that Israel end a military incursion into the Gaza Strip intended to root out Palestinian mortar squads, continues to resonate in the region.

Powell called the Israeli response to Palestinian violence "excessive and disproportionate." Saying there could be no military solution to the ongoing crisis, he urged the two sides to return to diplomacy.

Israel's political and military establishments are still arguing over whether Powell's rebuke prompted the Israel Defense Force's withdrawal from the square mile of Gaza it had occupied less than 24 hours before — or whether Sharon and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer already had decided to pull back.

But there is no argument that Powell's words represented a departure for the Bush administration, which previously had signaled that it would be less involved in Middle East policy than was President Clinton.

With broader regional interests in mind, the Bush administration wants to show the Arab world that it is committed to ending the violence and putting peace talks back on track. That is now being made clear to Israel.

Europe, meanwhile, is displaying growing impatience with the deteriorating situation in the Mideast. France reportedly is preparing a proposal for the European Union to threaten Israel with economic sanctions.

While the "old Sharon" was considered impervious to international opinion, as prime minister Sharon is proving anxious to avoid gratuitous tensions with key international players.

Political observers also say that Sharon's "no talks under fire" policy was a position more honored in the breach than in the observance.

After all, Sharon has sent his son Omri — reputed to be Sharon's closest adviser — for at least two recent meetings with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Sharon insists that he will continue to send his son, despite the attorney general's reservations about the use of relatives to conduct affairs of state.

In addition, security talks involving officials from both sides continue to occur with seeming disregard for the level of ongoing violence.

The agenda in these meetings ostensibly is limited to security matters.

But the line between security and diplomatic dialogue obviously is vague.

Moreover, Sharon has been kept informed about a series of meetings between Israeli politicians and businessmen and their Palestinian counterparts.

Among them is the indefatigable Yossi Beilin, the leading Labor Party dove who no longer is a member of Knesset or holds any other public position.

Beilin's freelance diplomacy in the early 1990s was one of the main factors behind the Oslo peace accords.

Sources close to Beilin say privately that he now is seeking to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table, and may even be working to arrange a meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Also involved is Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who met last week with the president of Cyprus — and remarked cryptically that the divided island would be an ideal spot for belligerents to negotiate. □