



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel marks tense anniversary

An Israeli helicopter shot down a small Lebanese civilian plane after it crossed into Israel's airspace and refused to respond to radio contact, Israeli officials said.

Israel had been on high alert for possible attacks — including suicide planes — by Hezbollah on Thursday, the first anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. [Page 4]

Jerusalem wedding hall collapses

A wedding hall in Jerusalem collapsed, killing at least 15 people and injuring more than 200 others. Dozens more remained trapped, police said.

More than 600 people were attending a wedding when the ceiling collapsed. The city's police chief said Thursday's incident did not appear to have been caused by a bombing.

Groups hopeful about new Senate

Some U.S. Jewish groups are hopeful that issues such as hate crime prevention and immigration will get more attention in the newly reconfigured U.S. Senate, which now has a Democratic majority.

The balance in the Senate changed after Sen. James Jeffords, a moderate Republican from Vermont, announced Thursday that he is switching his party affiliation to Independent. [Page 3]

House votes no on vouchers

The U.S. House of Representatives voted against two voucher amendments to the education bill. After a spirited debate Wednesday, attempts by conservatives to insert into the legislation a national voucher program and a limited voucher pilot project failed by wide margins.

The programs would have allowed federal funding to help parents pay for their children's private school tuition. Opposition to such programs traditionally has been strong among Conservative and Reform Jews, historic opponents of state aid to parochial schools.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 28, Tuesday, May 29 and Wednesday, May 30.

Critics' concerns not quieted by Zuckerman election at Conference

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Everyone agrees that Mortimer Zuckerman brings clout and cachet to the chairmanship of one of America's most influential Jewish groups.

He may need to draw on that charm to overcome the wariness of a small but vocal liberal faction that voted Wednesday against Zuckerman, a media and real estate baron, in the election for chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The groups worry about a potential conflict of interest between Zuckerman's regular column in the magazine he owns — U. S. News & World Report — and the chairman's responsibility to express opinions reached by consensus of the 54 groups that make up the Conference of Presidents.

The six left-leaning groups said after the vote that they will give Zuckerman the benefit of the doubt. But they warned that they will watch closely to see if his fortnightly column deviates from the conference consensus.

Zuckerman, who was nominated from a pool of eight candidates, triumphed Wednesday by a 46-6 margin. Two groups were absent and did not vote.

The result was a rare instance of dissension in a conference election, where votes usually are unanimous.

Zuckerman's supporters, however, say the wide margin represents a strong repudiation of his critics.

Zuckerman also received bipartisan support from Israel's two most recent prime ministers, Ehud Barak and Benjamin Netanyahu.

Four of the groups that voted against Zuckerman represent the Reform movement, which says it is the largest of the American Jewish denominations.

They were joined by Americans for Peace Now and the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.

Their primary concern is Zuckerman's column in U.S. News & World Report. Zuckerman also owns and publishes the New York Daily News and is presumed to have some degree of influence over the paper's news coverage and editorials.

One of the Conference chairman's tasks is to publicly voice the "consensus" of the membership — and by extension, the Jewish community.

Generally perceived as right-of-center on Israel, Zuckerman has been vague about whether he will continue to use his column to address Israeli and Middle Eastern issues.

Many observers perceive the Conference as leaning historically to the right on Israel — further, at least, than the Jewish public at large.

The groups that opposed Zuckerman are concerned that, in the event of a strong disagreement, he could use his column to express his opinions when the conference has failed to achieve consensus.

Articulating the concerns of the Reform movement, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, addressed the Conference membership Wednesday just prior to the Zuckerman vote.

"I remain uncomfortable with this arrangement. There's the potential for difficulties for the Conference and for the Jewish community in that anything he writes, particularly on the Middle East, will be seen as reflecting the will of the Conference and of the Jewish community," Yoffie said after the vote.

"Therefore, it is my hope Zuckerman will refrain from writing on the Middle East, and if he does, that he be exceedingly cautious."

Yoffie and others now are seeking to strike a conciliatory note with Zuckerman,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians fire on settlement

Palestinian militants fired mortars Thursday at the Israeli settlement of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip, but caused no injuries.

In response, Israel sent tanks into Palestinian-controlled territory in Gaza, firing shells and machine guns before withdrawing a half hour later.

Teen killed in Gaza

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian teen-ager in the Gaza Strip on Thursday near the border fence with Egypt, according to Palestinian hospital officials.

The teen was the first Palestinian reported killed since Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called for a cease-fire on Tuesday.

Solzhenitsyn declines invitation

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met with Alexander Solzhenitsyn during his visit to Russia this week and invited the Nobel Prize-winning author to visit Israel, according to Moscow press reports.

Solzhenitsyn declined, saying he is busy writing, including a book "on Jewish-Russian relations."

Israeli Arab called accomplice

An Israeli court charged an Israeli Arab as an accomplice to murder for transporting from the West Bank the Hamas terrorist who carried out last Friday's suicide bombing in Netanya, killing five Israelis.

Ahmed Jaber, who is married to an Israeli Jew, said that after he heard about the attack he thought it might have been carried out by the Palestinian from whom he accepted about \$25 for the ride.

Water deal evades Israel, Turkey

Israel and Turkey were unable to clinch a deal for the Jewish state to export 50 million cubic meters of water a year from Turkey. Thursday's talks were inconclusive because the transport costs have yet to be decided, Israeli officials said.

expressing congratulations and support for him. But they also say they will closely monitor his future columns.

"Our opposition to him was not based on personality but on principle," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of ARZA/World Union. "My hope is that he fully understands the responsibility of the chairman, that at all times, he represents and articulates the consensus and only the consensus."

In his acceptance speech Wednesday, Zuckerman acknowledged the importance of consensus. "At our table, the issues can be discussed and debated with all points of view heard," he said. "And then we can come together and focus on what we have in common, rather than on what we differ. That is the way to advance the causes we hold dear."

The notion of consensus is itself somewhat ambiguous: you know it when you see it. The issue has been smoldering since January, when outgoing Chairman Ronald Lauder appeared at a massive rally in support of an undivided Jerusalem.

Lauder had failed to gain consensus approval from the Conference to speak at the event, and therefore tried to present himself to the crowd as "an individual" expressing his own concern.

The media, however, identified Lauder as the Conference chairman and described the rally as opposed to the policies of Israel's then-premier, Ehud Barak.

Critics charged that Lauder breached a cardinal rule of the Conference — unconditional support for any Israeli government.

The Conference subsequently codified rules on when a chairman can and cannot speak publicly: only if he has first achieved consensus and expresses policies arrived at by consensus. In effect, the conference decided, the chairman waives the right to speak as "an individual."

Some observers expect Zuckerman's column to challenge that policy, perhaps soon.

The Middle East is just one issue Zuckerman writes about. He recently wrote in favor of the search for alternate energy sources and oil-drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

This week, however, several Jewish religious leaders joined interfaith colleagues in criticizing the Bush administration's new energy policy, calling for "the safest, cleanest and most sustainable sources of energy to protect and preserve God's creation."

If Zuckerman is seen as "speaking for the Jews," would his stance on energy undermine the efforts of fellow Jewish leaders?

It's rare to find an "issue that could be written about that does not in some way affect the Jewish community," Hirsch said.

Yet Zuckerman's critics are most concerned by his stance on Israel, and they are curious to see how he responds to what may be his first test: Will he weigh in on the recent report of the Mitchell Commission, which investigated Israeli-Palestinian violence?

The coalition government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — about whom Zuckerman has written approvingly — rejects one of the report's core recommendations: a freeze on Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

However, many on the Israeli and American Jewish left support such a settlement freeze, and even the abandonment of many settlements.

Will Zuckerman tread into these controversial waters in his column?

Conference dissenters say they want to know.

"The point we're making is that if there's a problem, it's not a problem created by us," Yoffie said. "It's a problem created by the fact we have a chairman who apparently will continue to write a column for a national magazine." □

Work begins at massacre site

NEW YORK (JTA) — Warsaw Rabbi Michael Schudrich kept a watchful eye as workers began removing soil this week from a mass grave of Jews massacred nearly 60 years ago by their Polish neighbors.

Poland's Jewish community reluctantly accepted the government's decision to exhume the bodies in the northeastern town of Jedwabne as part of an inquiry into the atrocity. Schudrich said Thursday he believed the actual exhumations would not begin until Wednesday, after the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Jeffords' move could mean more Senate progress on Jewish issues

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Many Jewish groups are gratified by the decision of Sen. James Jeffords to leave the Republican Party and become an Independent, changing the balance of power in the U.S. Senate.

With the defection of Jeffords, a Vermont moderate recently elected to a third term, a number of issues dear to the Jewish community now will have better chances in the restructured chamber, several Jewish groups predicted.

The move means the Democrats will have a slim voting edge of 50-49-1 in the Senate.

As the majority party, Democrats will take over chairmanships of most committees, setting the legislative agenda and deciding which bills to bring to the floor.

Until Jeffords' abrupt decision Thursday, the Senate was evenly split between 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats, with Vice President Dick Cheney having the tie-breaking vote.

The change will give Democrats control of the Senate for the first time since 1994, and will take effect after President Bush signs the tax bill later this week.

For the Jewish community, the impact of the switch will be felt mostly on domestic issues, as there is strong bipartisan support for Israel. Leadership changes on foreign relations and appropriations committees are not expected to significantly affect U.S. policy toward Israel.

With the Senate so narrowly divided, the now-minority Republicans will continue to wield a lot of power. Nevertheless, there is anticipation that changes are afoot.

A Democratic majority will make it easier to move forward pro-immigration bills, said Richard Foltin, legislative director for the American Jewish Committee.

It also will be less likely that charitable choice initiatives — which allow religious groups to receive government funds to provide social services — will be a part of any bill, Foltin said.

Some Jewish groups fear charitable choice measures will break down the wall separating church and state and infringe on religious liberties.

Civil rights concerns about charitable choice will resonate more with Democrats, which could help diminish the likelihood of a broad expansion of charitable choice, said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL will press the newly reconfigured Senate to take up a hate crimes bill, an issue that had little hope of advancing prior to Jeffords' move.

The Democratic leadership is more likely to support a free-standing hate crimes bill and push it forward.

In his announcement, the 67-year-old Jeffords said he foresaw a number of issues where he would be in conflict with the administration, such as abortion rights, the direction of the judiciary, education and the environment.

Jeffords, who chaired the Education and Labor Committee, got into a disagreement recently with the White House as he pushed for more education funding than the Bush administration wants. The chairmanship now will likely go to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

In addition, Bush's attempts to place conservatives on the federal bench will hit more than a snag as either Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) or Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Delaware) could become chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

In addition, having someone who's pro-choice and amenable to women's rights makes the process of judicial nominations much less daunting, said Sammie Moshenberg, director of the Washington office of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Other issues such as child health care, which are not necessarily contentious but were not on the radar screen of the Republican-controlled Senate, may now see the light of day, Moshenberg said.

However, Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said Jeffords' switch will not radically change things. But Diament does believe that issues of religious freedom in the workplace may have a better chance to advance under Democratic leadership, since the issues were resisted by the business community, which is more aligned with the Republican party. □

Groups cite offensive testimony

Jewish groups renewed their opposition to President Bush's faith-based initiative.

They backed up their stance by citing a religious social services program director who testified on Capitol Hill that Jews were "completed" — that is, had accepted Jesus — at his substance abuse treatment center.

The Anti-Defamation League and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism said the director's testimony shows how federal funding could go to programs that proselytize.

Germany 'horrified' by edict

Germany's foreign minister said his nation is "horrified" by a Taliban decree requiring Afghanistan's Hindu minority to wear yellow badges.

"There is no justification for this measure, which is severe discrimination against a religious minority," Joschka Fischer said Thursday.

The issue is particularly poignant in Germany because the Nazis required Jews to wear yellow stars.

RJC leader visits New York

Dozens of Jewish leaders attended a meeting Thursday in New York to welcome the newly elected president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Succeeding Vladimir Goussinsky at the helm of one of Russian Jewry's umbrella groups, Leonid Nevzlin came to New York and Washington this week to meet with U.S. and Jewish officials.

He was hosted during his visit by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the World Jewish Congress, and NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

Tennessee school studies Shoah

Students at a Tennessee school have completed a project that represents a unique way to study the Holocaust. For two years, students at the Whitwell Middle School collected paper clips with the goal of getting a total of 6 million, one for each Jew killed in the Holocaust.

On Wednesday, when they concluded the project, Holocaust survivors traveled to the school from New York to share their harrowing wartime experiences with the students.

Liechtenstein to search for loot

Liechtenstein appointed a group of historians to investigate whether the European principality helped hide or transfer assets stolen by the Nazis.

A government spokesman said Tuesday the move followed talks with the World Jewish Congress, but that there had been "no pressure" from Jewish groups.

A year later, Israelis still debate wisdom of Lebanon withdrawal

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces were on high alert along the northern border this week after Hezbollah threatened to mark the one-year anniversary of the Israeli troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon by attacking the Jewish state.

In a sign of that tension, the Israeli air force on Thursday shot down a Lebanese civilian plane after it entered Israeli airspace and the pilot ignored orders to identify himself.

The French news agency in Beirut said the pilot was a student who left his instructor on the tarmac and took off without authorization.

Israel said the air force used internationally recognized signals to give the pilot an opportunity to identify himself.

When he failed to do so, the Cessna plane was regarded as a hostile aircraft and was shot down shortly before it would have reached Israel's densely populated center.

The pilot was killed when the plane went down along the Mediterranean coast north of Netanya.

There was no immediate word on whether the plane was carrying weapons or explosives.

Israel also said shots were fired Wednesday night at Israeli troops near the Fatma Gate, a former crossing into Lebanon near Metullah.

There were no Israeli injuries.

Thursday's plane incident came exactly a year after the Israel Defense Force completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon on May 24, 2000, locking a border gate behind the last troops.

The withdrawal ended a 22-year military presence that had grown increasingly unpopular in Israel and claimed the lives of more than 1,000 Israeli soldiers.

The withdrawal marked the fulfillment of then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak's 1999 election campaign pledge to "bring the boys home."

After the withdrawal, however, Hezbollah gunmen filled the power vacuum that was created in the region.

Calls from both Israel and the United Nations for the Lebanese government to deploy its troops along the border went unheeded, with Beirut in effect leaving it up to Hezbollah and its Syrian sponsors to determine the degree of tension and violence along the border.

Within days after the Israeli withdrawal, Hezbollah called on the Jewish state to withdraw from an area known as Shabaa Farms, vowing it would continue its attacks until Israel gave the area to Lebanon.

However, the United Nations certified the Israeli withdrawal as complete and rejected the Lebanese claim to Shabaa Farms, saying it was Syrian territory that Israel captured in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Last October, Hezbollah kidnapped three Israeli soldiers in a cross-border attack in the Shabaa Farms area.

Shortly afterward, the group kidnapped an Israeli businessman whom it accused of being an intelligence agent.

A year later, Barak's decision to withdraw troops is still controversial here.

Some applaud the move, saying it spared Israeli lives — and spared Israel international criticism over its occupation of a

security zone inside Lebanon. These supporters only wish the withdrawal had happened sooner.

Others say that Israel's Arab neighbors — far from viewing the withdrawal as a move toward peace — saw it as a sign of Israeli weakness. These critics say the Palestinians were emboldened by Hezbollah's success in forcing out Israeli troops — a leading cause, they claim, of the violent Palestinian uprising that began last September.

Science Minister Matan Vilnai, a former IDF deputy chief of staff who was also a minister in Barak's government at the time of the pullback, defended the move.

Vilnai said this week that it is too early to have a historical perspective on the withdrawal, but the events of the past year appear to show that it was the right decision.

"I think the process was correct strategically. When we look at the past year, all the incidents that occurred in a year along the border would have occurred in the course of a week when we were in the security zone," Vilnai told Israel Radio.

Regarding recent Hezbollah threats to launch further attacks on Israel, Vilnai said they are to be taken seriously, but "there is a big gap between a threat and action."

For residents living on Israel's northern border, a single word comes up over and over again when they are asked about the past 12 months — quiet.

After years under threat of Katyusha rocket attacks and daily life conducted against a backdrop of artillery booms across the border, the troop withdrawal brought a calm that the region had not felt in decades.

The situation room in Kiryat Shmona — a border city often targeted by Hezbollah rockets — spends more time these days addressing mundane issues of municipal life than monitoring the state of bomb shelters.

But an undercurrent of tension remains among area residents, fueled by their awareness that everything could change in a moment.

A recent fireworks display during a students' field day set off a flurry of inquiries by worried residents.

"Every small noise, we are concerned and check into. The children especially are afraid. There are situations when the children ask to sleep with us," resident Shimon Biton said.

"It was a relatively quiet year, but a year which is under test," he said.

The local tourist industry, devastated when fighting flared along the border, is starting to revive. Guest houses and hotels expected 80 percent to 90 percent occupancy over the Shavuot holiday weekend.

But residents of communities that sit right on the border, such as Zarit and Margalioth, complain that tourists have not yet returned. Local leaders note that a single holiday weekend is not enough to sustain the regional economy.

Shlomo Buhbut, head of a group representing communities on the northern confrontation line, complained that with rockets no longer falling on the area, the government is shifting its priorities elsewhere.

"The government is already talking about cutting budgets. What the region needs is sustained investment and development," he told Israel Radio.

Still, according to the radio, 100 new families moved to Kiryat Shmona during the past year — reversing the outward flight during the period of rocket attacks. □