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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Reports: Cease-fire reached

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat reportedly accepted CIA Director George Tenet's proposal for a lasting cease-fire in the Middle East.

Earlier in the day, Israel accepted Tenet's cease-fire proposal, despite some reservations about details.

Meanwhile, a Greek monk who was in a car with Israeli license plates was killed in a drive-by shooting in the West Bank.

UJC finalizes leadership changes

The top professional in the Cleveland Jewish federation officially was named chief executive officer of the United Jewish Communities, the North American federation umbrella.

Stephen Hoffman, who starts in July, will replace Stephen Solender, who will become president emeritus in November.

The UJC also officially nominated James Tisch chair of its board and Robert Goldberg chair of the executive committee, effective October.

Embassy waiver extended

The White House extended for an additional six months a waiver against moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said White House officials told him Monday that "the timing couldn't be worse" to move the embassy.

Hoenlein said he was also told that U.S. officials will reaffirm their commitment to move the office once the violence has stopped.

Man wins yarmulka lawsuit

A U.S. jury awarded \$100,000 to a former telephone company employee who was fired months after he became an Orthodox Jew. The jury agreed Monday with Jeffrey Bander, who says a supervisor told him to shave his beard and stop wearing a yarmulka and said he couldn't work with Bander because "you people think you're better."

BellSouth, which says it will appeal, maintains Bander was fired because he failed to follow procedures for taking time off.

Bander became Orthodox after his eldest son was killed by a drunk driver.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

For Reform leader, nixing Israel trips is just his latest controversial action

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a Jewish community chanting the mantra of "solidarity" with Israel with ever-greater urgency, Rabbi Eric Yoffie is emerging as the leading voice of dissent.

As president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations — whose approximately 1.5 million members make it the largest of the American Jewish denominations — Yoffie has taken the lead on a handful of controversial issues in recent months.

Yoffie increasingly is perceived as the leader of the American Jewish left, which is struggling to regain its bearings after the initial shock of the Palestinian uprising.

Yoffie's recent outspokenness has earned him more quotes in The New York Times and other influential newspapers than he received in the past, but also more enemies among Jewish and Israeli leaders.

His admirers — and even some critics — laud Yoffie for possessing the "courage of his convictions." Others wonder whether his media presence is driven by an ambition to fill the shoes of his predecessor, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who retired from his UAHC post in 1996, and until his death in November was lauded as "the last of the giants" of 20th-century U.S. Jewish leaders.

Regardless of the motivation, a pattern has emerged concerning the 53-year-old Yoffie: A controversy breaks publicly, and Yoffie is at the forefront of the voices of condemnation.

First came his criticism in January of Ronald Lauder, then-chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, for a speech Lauder made at a controversial Jerusalem rally without the blessing of the Conference.

Then, in February, Yoffie publicly chastised Jewish leaders who he said had been "bought" to write letters to President Clinton in support of a pardon for fugitive billionaire Marc Rich.

In April, Yoffie spearheaded a campaign against Mortimer Zuckerman after it became clear that Zuckerman was the front-runner to replace Lauder as Conference chairman. In Yoffie's view, Zuckerman faced a potential conflict of interest due to his political column in the magazine he owns, U.S. News & World Report.

This month brought a double whammy.

In a June 1 speech in Cleveland, Yoffie leveled harsh criticism at Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat for sparking and then failing to curb Mideast violence — but the headlines were dominated by Yoffie's call for a freeze on Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That call echoed a core recommendation of an international fact-finding team led by former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell. But it was also seen by some Jewish and Israeli leaders as a slap at Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who had sought to qualify such a freeze.

The timing of Yoffie's call was lousy: That night in Israel, a Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up outside a Tel Aviv disco, killing 20 Israeli youths.

The bombing provided a backdrop for Yoffie's next declaration. On June 2, he announced that the Reform movement — which says it has sent some 30,000 American Jewish teen-agers to Israel during the past four decades — became the first Jewish movement to cancel its summer trips because it could not guarantee the teen-agers' safety.

Yoffie, who himself plans to visit Israel in coming weeks and lead a Reform

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan: Time running out

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that time may be running out on a chance for a lasting cease-fire and peace in the Middle East.

"I think we have a fleeting moment, a fleeting opportunity which we must seize and seize promptly," Annan said in Cairo in Tuesday.

Annan is on a tour of the Middle East.

He is scheduled to visit Israel on Friday and the West Bank on Saturday.

Egypt doesn't laugh at comedian

Egyptian officials summoned Israel's ambassador to Egypt for discussions after an Israeli comedian's impersonation of President Hosni Mubarak.

The comedian, Eli Yatzpan, said he bears no ill will against Mubarak. Yatzpan also has imitated Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat as part of his routines.

Bomb victims' families get \$750

An Israeli parliamentary committee approved payment of approximately \$750 each to the families of the victims in a suicide bombing attack at a Tel Aviv disco.

Twenty Israelis were killed in the attack earlier this month.

Most of them were young immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Wedding hall owner kills himself

The owner of an Israeli banquet hall hanged himself several hours after his operating license was revoked for failure to meet safety regulations.

The incident comes against a backdrop of stepped-up activities by local authorities to enforce building codes and regulations following last month's Jerusalem wedding hall collapse in which 23 people were killed.



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mission there in July, described it as one of the most difficult decisions he has ever made.

Legal liability was "a passing concern, but it really was not as significant as our moral responsibility," Yoffie told JTA. "If we run the program, then we're responsible for them."

Yet a number of Israeli and American Jewish leaders are irate about Yoffie's perceived breach of solidarity. Yoffie has delivered a victory to terrorists who seek to further isolate the Jewish state, they said.

Some of the harshest criticism has come from within the Reform movement itself. Rabbi Marc Gelman, president of the New York Board of Rabbis, said he is "ashamed" of the move and blasted Yoffie as "a good man who's made very stupid decisions" in recent weeks.

Gelman, who describes himself as a more conservative member of a movement "that has lurched to the left politically," said he left a message for Yoffie on Monday imploring him to reverse the decision to cancel the trips.

"My voice is not alone in this," Gelman told JTA. "Eric Yoffie does not speak for the entire Reform movement on these matters. There is a vigorous voice of dissent. He speaks for his vision of the Reform movement, and that's what a leader should do. But that doesn't mean the leader is always right."

In response, Yoffie said, "In a movement as large and diverse as ours, we expect and anticipate criticism, and we accept that. That's the price of pluralism."

Critics outside the Reform movement said the decision on youth trips only fuels the perception that Reform Jews are less committed to Israel than their Conservative or Orthodox counterparts.

But Yoffie's defenders said he is a devoted Zionist, who reads the Hebrew-language Israeli papers daily and remained in Israel during the Gulf War "to be with the people of Israel."

Moreover, he "inspires fellow Jews toward deeper understanding of Judaism and Jewish continuity," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of ARZA/World Union, who has joined Yoffie on several of his recent crusades.

One Jewish leader, whose organization this week reiterated its support for solidarity trips to Israel, nevertheless praised Yoffie for having the courage to speak his mind.

Others have taken note as well. The Forward newspaper ranked Yoffie first in its "Top Fifty" list of Jewish leaders in 1999.

Still, some are irritated by Yoffie's propensity to go directly to the media with his contrarian views, presumably guided by a circle of PR professionals.

"Nobody questions his right to do it, all I'm doing is questioning the wisdom of doing it," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who was stung by Yoffie's criticism for writing a letter on Marc Rich's behalf.

"Why go out and find ways to rip us apart and cause dissent? Why go public and grandstand on this issue?" Foxman asked. "As a spiritual leader, he's not acting as a stimulant for bringing us together."

Others also would like to see Yoffie keep his opinions to himself, or at least low-key.

"A lot of this has to do with timing," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Presidents Conference, who was outraged by Yoffie's continued resistance to Zuckerman. "Right now, every announcement and pronouncement has an effect," Hoenlein said. "This is certainly not the time for contentiousness. Anything that creates divisiveness is counterproductive."

Yoffie responded with sarcasm to the charge that he is media-hungry: "I'm just a media genius, as demonstrated by the wonderful response to this decision" to cancel youth trips.

"I'm not particularly aware of other Jewish leaders being shy about expressing their values and concerns, nor would I expect them to be," he said. "I say what I think and I say what I believe."

Regarding the accusation that he seeks media exposure to match the Rabbi Schindler's profile, Yoffie responds defiantly.

"Alex Schindler was the greatest American Jewish leader of the last half century, and I'll never fill those shoes," he said. "But if I learned anything from Alex, it's to embrace Torah and speak the truth as you see it. And ultimately, that's all that's important." □

JEWISH WORLD

Charitable choice hearings address Jewish concerns, but difficulties remain

By Sharon Samber

Senate rejects voucher plan

The U.S. Senate rejected an amendment for private school vouchers by a 58-41 vote.

Most Jewish groups were pleased by Tuesday's defeat of a \$50 million pilot voucher program for students of low-income parents, saying it would have drained money from the public school system, but Orthodox Jews expressed disappointment.

Memorial firm linked to Nazis

The parent company of a firm building the new \$56 million World War II memorial in Washington once used Jewish slave labor.

The German company Philipp Holzmann, which owns the U.S. firm contracted to honor Americans killed in the war, contributed to a \$5 billion German fund to compensate slave and forced laborers.

Supremacist gets three years

A U.S. white supremacist who defaced two synagogues and the offices of a Jewish congressman was sentenced to three years in prison. California resident Alex James Curtis pleaded guilty Monday to the charges, which included placing stickers with swastikas that read, "Yabba Dabba Doo, Kill Every Jew," on the office of Rep. Bob Filner (D-Ca.).

Texas passes law for survivors

Holocaust victims and their heirs in Texas will now be allowed to bring action against any insurer to receive proceeds from unpaid insurance policies under legislation signed into law Tuesday.

The law is similar to legislation that passed in five other states as well. The U.S. State Department objects to state laws allowing such lawsuits, saying they interfere with implementation of international compensation agreements.

In Italy, Jews attack Jew

A Jewish peace activist in Italy was recently accosted after he criticized current Israeli policy in a local Jewish magazine. As he was walking toward the Israeli Embassy in Rome to a vigil in support of Israel, Giorgio Gomel was accosted by other Jews who called him a "friend of Arafat" and tried to attack him. "Nothing like this has happened in our community for years," one member of Rome's Jewish community said.

Australians mark Anne Frank Day

More than 150 prominent Australians participated in a 14-hour public reading of "The Diary of Anne Frank" on what would have been the Dutch Jewish girl's 72nd birthday. Among the readers was Eva Schloss, the stepsister of the diarist, who is visiting Australia in conjunction with the tour of an exhibition honoring both Anne Frank and Righteous Gentiles.

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Bush administration may be looking for a compromise on its plans to expand government funding of religious organizations that provide social services.

The White House has moderated its position on charitable choice somewhat over the past several months, but many Jewish groups still fear that an expanded partnership between the government and faith-based institutions could break down the constitutional wall separating church and state, infringe on religious liberties and imply a tolerance of employment discrimination.

Further evidence of this moderation came during Senate and House of Representatives hearings last week.

Carl Esbeck, senior counsel to the deputy attorney general, testified there is growing interest in indirect forms of aid to faith-based organizations.

He also said charitable choice funding is not appropriate for every religious organization, and that those organizations that do want the federal money will have to structure their programs to follow government rules.

The major piece of charitable choice legislation in the House, the Community Solutions Act of 2001, already contains some safeguards against religious coercion, but the Justice Department recommended revisions.

The bill states explicitly that if a beneficiary of a program objects to the religious character of the organization, the government must provide an accessible — and nonreligious — alternative.

"No funds provided through a grant or contract to a religious organization to provide assistance under any program shall be expended for sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization," the bill reads.

The Justice Department suggested that if organizations do offer such religious services, they must be voluntary and offered separately from the programs funded from the government.

The proposed changes are important, and administration efforts to address concerns are welcome, said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League. However, the effort is not enough to quell Jewish fears, Lieberman said.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, told the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution on June 7 that abandoning protections for religious groups in pursuit of a level playing field is "a political time bomb for religion in America."

At that meeting, witnesses enumerated the pros and cons of charitable choice for lawmakers who sometimes seemed confused both on the law's basic points and on its practicality.

Orthodox Jewish groups maintain that religious organizations are discriminated against under current law and should be given a fair chance.

"Government ought to establish grant criteria that have nothing to do with whether prospective grantees are religious or secular, but simply whether they have the capacity to perform the service," Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, told the Senate Judiciary Committee on June 6.

While apparently willing to make minor modifications, the White House is not backtracking from its initiative, which calls for direct government funding of churches and synagogues for their work in areas such as drug treatment and homeless services.

On a recent visit to Habitat for Humanity, the house-building and home ownership promotion program run by a Christian organization, President Bush reiterated his view that government should not fear working alongside faith-based organizations, but should fund them.

Much of the problem with charitable choice still lies in how it will be put into practice. Douglas Laycock, a constitutional scholar, said charitable choice has its merits, but called the difficulties of implementation "serious."

Some lawmakers questioned the practicality of providing alternative secular programs and wondered how the government would monitor programs.

Further hearings on the matter were scheduled for late this week. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli left and right conclude that Arafat is the main problem

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — “Enough of trying to understand” Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, a prominent, dovish Israeli columnist wrote midweek in the liberal newspaper Ha'aretz. “I am sick and tired of it.”

The columnist's outburst of exasperation reflects current opinion on the Israeli left.

More and more opinion-makers — in politics, the media and the academic community — are openly voicing the thought, eight years after Oslo, that as long as Arafat heads the Palestinian national movement, no peace and reconciliation with Israel is possible.

On the right, people who have long held this view now suggest openly that the Israeli government act on it — and remove the P.A. chairman.

The peace camp's frustration with Arafat came to a boil late last year, when it saw that then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak's sweeping concessions to the Palestinians at Camp David and in subsequent negotiations were rejected out of hand.

Despite an Israeli offer that met most of the Palestinians' ostensible demands — to evacuate the entire Gaza Strip and virtually the entire West Bank, dismantle most Jewish settlements, divide Jerusalem and give the Palestinians operative control over the Temple Mount — the Palestinians refused to declare an end to the 100-year conflict with Israel.

For months, Israeli left-wingers agonized over what had gone wrong, wondering whether Barak's gruff style had offended Arafat or whether President Clinton's zeal to reach a deal had unnerved Palestinian negotiators.

The outbreak of the violent Palestinian uprising, and especially its intensification in recent months, has brought disillusionment with Arafat to a new peak.

And some wonder whether it has become impossible to climb down from this peak to the modicum of confidence necessary for a peace agreement.

All but the most marginal factions on the Israeli left have become convinced that the present Palestinian leadership is “not a partner for peace,” in Barak's words.

Not even the reported Palestinian acceptance late Tuesday night of CIA Director George Tenet's cease-fire plan was likely to significantly reduce Israeli skepticism about Arafat's intentions.

In Israel, the feeling was that Sharon's self-restraint, widely praised at home and abroad, could not withstand one more major terror attack.

Another suicide bombing, it was felt, would unleash an Israeli military retaliation so strong that it would end peace diplomacy for a long time to come.

Here the question of Israel's attitude to Arafat may become immediate and practical.

As left and right alike have come to hold the Palestinian leader personally responsible for the past months of bloodshed, some suggest that he could become the direct target of a new Israeli reprisal policy.

Until recently, such thoughts were confined to the fringe right. Mainstream politicians, however militant, discouraged such speculation, noting that no responsible country tries to choose its

neighbors' leaders. The traditional consensus in the intelligence community, moreover, was that Arafat and his coterie are preferable to the Islamic fundamentalists who could jostle for power if the Palestinian Authority loses its dominance.

Those former truisms are no longer considered axiomatic. Israeli analysts — and some politicians — now publicly contemplate whether a Palestinian leadership change would necessarily be a step backward.

If the situation reverts to full-scale fighting, there is talk — and no longer just on the fringes — of Israel deciding to topple the Palestinian Authority leadership and force its top echelon out of the country.

Indeed, it was then-Defense Minister Sharon who used the Israeli army to destroy the PLO's terrorist mini-state in southern Lebanon and force Arafat out of Beirut during the Lebanon War in 1982.

The Palestinian leaders took refuge in Tunis and remained there until Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin allowed them to enter the territories in 1994 under the terms of the Oslo peace process — which was conditioned on their consent to renounce the path of violent struggle against Israel.

If given the orders, there is little doubt that the Israel Defense Force and the other Israeli security services have the means to effect such a forcible deportation.

Even those who dare to contemplate such a scenario recognize that it might trigger a wider, regional war.

But, they argue, Israel cannot sit by waiting for biology to run its course on the Palestinian leaders while, in the meantime, they incite a relentless terrorist assault on the Israeli populace.

Until very recently, the expected strong censure of the international community would have convinced most Israeli strategists to reject such a strategy out of hand.

Lately, however — especially since the June 1 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, which killed 20 Israeli youths outside a discotheque — Arafat's standing in Western opinion has been seriously eroded, at least temporarily.

That is not to say that direct Israeli action against Arafat would be condoned internationally; indeed, some believe that so much time has elapsed since the Tel Aviv bombing that any Israeli military action now would be seen not as a response but as a provocation.

However, once the dogs of war are unleashed, many analysts feel, no amount of international pressure will suffice to rein them in.

The knowledge that Israel was planning a retaliation so severe that it could well topple his regime is considered one of the factors behind Arafat's call for a cease-fire after the Tel Aviv disco bombing.

The hope in Israeli political circles is that this very scenario, considered unthinkable until recently, will help persuade the Palestinian leadership to enforce a genuine cease-fire. □

Group: Palestinian beatings up

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli human rights group said harassment and beatings of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers and police have risen dramatically since the eruption of violence eight months ago.

B'Tselem said in a recent report that abuses of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers had become a regular occurrence since the violence began. □