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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Extremists kill 3 Palestinians

Three Palestinians were killed in a drive-by shooting in the West Bank.

An extremist Jewish group called the Committee for Road Safety claimed responsibility for Thursday night's attack, which took place at a checkpoint west of Hebron.

Charitable choice passes House

The U.S. House of Representatives voted 233-198 to let religious groups receive direct federal funds for a range of social service programs, amid allegations that the new legislation will allow employment discrimination.

Many Jewish groups, which fought the bill on the grounds that it breaks down the separation between church and state, were disappointed. [Page 3]

Argentine bombing marked

Some 5,000 people gathered Wednesday in Buenos Aires to mark the seventh anniversary of the bombing of a Jewish community center there.

Jewish leaders denounced Argentine officials, who have not yet found those responsible for the AMIA bombing, which killed 86 people and wounded about 300. "Seven years have passed without justice, without answers, and death will continue to triumph over life as long as the criminals remain free," said Hugo Ostrower, the president of AMIA. [Page 4]

Car bomb may have been terror

Israeli police say a car bomb that exploded in Netanya may have been a terror attack, and not a criminal attack as they initially believed, according to Israel Radio.

The Thursday morning explosion seriously wounded a man whom police describe as a known criminal.

Temple Mount bill introduced

Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.) introduced a bill on Thursday to halt all aid to the Palestinians until they cease construction work on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that appears to be harming archaeological remains.

Cantor, who recently returned from a trip to Israel, said taxpayer funds should not be "spent to destroy 2,000 years of Judeo-Christian heritage."

FOCUS ON ISSUES

For Jews, stem cell debate remains in the embryonic stage

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — "When does life begin?" is not your standard political question, but it's forcing the debate behind one of the hottest topics in Washington — stem cell research.

As President Bush ponders whether to allow federal funding for research using stem cells from discarded human embryos, Jewish ethicists and groups are debating the finer moral points of the issue.

Like the president, some groups are still delaying a formal position, but most ethicists agree that Jewish tradition allows embryos to be destroyed if the research has the potential to benefit society.

Admittedly, it's difficult to find traditional Jewish sources that address stem cell research directly, says professor Paul Root Wolpe, an ethicist at the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania.

Instead, Jewish ethicists are extrapolating from the Jewish legal tradition and rabbinic commentaries.

Many authorities cite the Jewish tradition's imperative to heal and the concept of *pikuach nefesh* — the responsibility to save human life, which overrides almost all other laws — to approve a broad range of medical experimentation.

A stem cell is a special kind of cell that has a unique capacity to renew itself and to develop into specialized cell types.

Researchers use stem cells to replace cells that are damaged or diseased. Many believe stem cell research can lead to cures for Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, heart disease and more.

Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America is in favor of stem cell research, as is the National Council of Jewish Women.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs has yet to adopt a formal stand on the stem cell issue.

Jewish tradition places minimal life value in early-stage embryos outside the womb, since the Talmud defines any embryo up to 40 days old "as if it were mere fluid." Forty days roughly corresponds to the onset of "quickening," the first noticeable movement of a fetus in a womb.

In addition, the location of an embryo — that is, whether it is inside a woman's uterus or in a lab — also makes a difference.

Embryos that remain outside the womb have no chance to become children — and therefore it is a *mitzvah* to use those embryos for scientific research, according to Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector and professor of philosophy at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

"It's not only permitted, there is a Jewish mandate to do so," Dorff said.

Others are less certain.

"There's potential life here, and we need to respect that and be cautious," said Rabbi Aaron Mackler, professor of theology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

Mackler, who supports stem cell research, notes that using embryos taken from fertility clinics makes the case for research easier, because those embryos already have been created — for the purposes of in-vitro fertilization.

Dorff, who wrote a book on Jewish medical ethics, said creating an embryo specifically to be a source of stem cells is permissible, but less morally justifiable.

Current recommendations of the Maryland-based National Institutes of Health state

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel rejects peacekeepers

Israel rejected a call by foreign ministers from the G-8 group of leading economic nations for international peacekeepers to monitor an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire, saying Thursday that Palestinian violence first must stop completely.

The ministers, meeting in Rome before a weekend summit in Genoa, Italy, had called earlier Thursday for the deployment of monitors.

Four Israeli Arabs arrested

Four Israeli Arabs from the northern town of Umm el-Fahm were arrested recently on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist cell that planned to carry out attacks inside Israel.

Two of the men confessed that they had agreed to plant bombs for a Nablus man affiliated with Hamas, Israeli officials said Thursday.

In a related development, Israeli police arrested a Palestinian who had a bomb in his car. The Palestinian, a resident of the Bethlehem area, was arrested Thursday in the Arab village of Abu Gosh outside Jerusalem.

Pardon in Rabin death petitioned

An Israeli legislator petitioned the nation's High Court of Justice to reverse President Moshe Katsav's decision to commute the sentence of a woman convicted of failing to prevent the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Eitan Cabel's petition stated that Katsav's decision went against the judgment of three courts that had found Margalit Har-Shefi guilty and refused to overturn her conviction or nine-month sentence.

Israelis not ecstatic about bust

Two Israelis were arrested in what New York police called the biggest Ecstasy drug bust in the city's history. Police found 450 pounds of Ecstasy pills worth \$40 million when they arrested the two this week.



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that federal funding should go only for research on frozen embryos that are slated to be discarded.

Early this year, Bush asked the Department of Health and Human Services to review stem cell research.

Government oversight of stem cell research could result in better research and quicker results, which would bolster the ethical argument for proceeding with federal funding, according to Ruth Macklin, professor of bioethics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York.

A just-released NIH report found that both embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells "present immense research opportunities for potential therapy."

But while embryonic stem cells can proliferate indefinitely, adult stem cells cannot.

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, professor of Jewish medical ethics at Yeshiva University in New York, called stem cell research "the hope of mankind."

"The only hope we have of understanding what's going on in the whole field of oncology, of cancer work, now resides in the stem cell research," he said at a recent event in Washington.

Tendler criticized a bill in the Senate that would stop the possibility of stem cell research.

"That I believe to be an evil that's being perpetrated on America," he said.

At a Senate hearing Wednesday, lawmakers argued both sides of the issue — and, surprisingly, some pro-life advocates supported stem cell research.

Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) both testified that stem cell research would be consistent with pro-life and pro-family views.

"We are at a confluence of science and technology," Smith said. "We must make the decision to do the greatest amount of good."

But Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) called embryos "very early human beings," adding that destroying them for research would be "deeply immoral, illegal and unnecessary."

The Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations sent letters this week to Bush and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson in favor of "carefully regulated" federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

Quoting Deuteronomy, the letter noted that Jewish tradition says that while only God can create life, God has charged humans with doing everything in their power to preserve it.

"I have put before you this day life and death. Choose life, that you and your children may live," the letter said.

The Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America, which is fervently Orthodox, do not have formal positions on the issue.

David Zwiebel, the executive vice president for government and public affairs for Agudath Israel, suggested there would not be an ethical problem with using those embryos slated to be discarded.

But Zwiebel was unsure whether the group wanted to weigh in on a policy level about use of government funds for the research.

Bush has been weighing the issue for months, and White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer has been fielding questions about the president's stance.

"The president is very understanding and respectful of the promises of science, but he's very concerned about any procedure that would involve taking stem cells from fetuses that are viable," Fleischer said in March.

During the campaign and as recently as May, Bush said he would oppose federally funded research or experimentation on embryonic stem cells that requires the destruction of living human embryos.

One compromise might be to allow funding for research on stem cells derived from the approximately 100,000 surplus embryos — now frozen in fertility clinics around the country — but would ban research on anything beyond that.

Fleischer said the president is carefully considering the different perspectives on the issue.

"The president is very aware that there is a balance on this issue, where there is so much potential for health and for breakthroughs," he said. "On the other hand, the president is very concerned about preserving a culture of life."

Fleischer said Bush had no hard timetable to make a decision. □

JEWISH WORLD

Groups form health coalition

Twenty-three leading U.S. Jewish groups formed the Jewish Coalition for Long Term Care to improve the health and well-being of elderly Jews and other older Americans.

The coalition, which grew out of a national effort organized by the United Jewish Communities, will focus on issues such as ensuring federal funding for senior housing, creating a universal Medicare prescription drug benefit, advancing wellness programs and finding solutions to the chronic staffing shortages affecting health care providers.

Holocaust bracelet auction halted

A Canadian auctioneer canceled the auction of what is believed to be an artifact from a Nazi concentration camp following complaints from Canadian Jewish groups.

The Quebec-based auctioneer says the bracelet, made out of tooth and human hair, has been destroyed. It reportedly came from Israel.

Ex-Nazi guard loses citizenship

A U.S. court stripped citizenship from a man who served as a Nazi guard during World War II.

A judge found that Mykola Wasyluk lied to U.S. immigration officials about his service at two slave labor camps in Poland. More recently, Wasyluk, 77, had owned rental bungalows in New York's Catskill Mountains.

Russia vows anti-hate law

A top Russian official pledged that legislation to combat hate and anti-Semitism soon will become law. Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matvienko made her comments in a meeting earlier this week with the Union of Councils for Jews in the FSU.

Venezuela pressed on Nazis

The Simon Wiesenthal Center asked the president of Venezuela to back efforts to find 18 suspected Nazi war criminals who emigrated to Venezuela after World War II.

The appeal to Hugo Chavez came as a Wiesenthal Center official charged that Venezuela never followed through on its promise to cooperate with the center's Nazi-hunting effort.

Israeli PR man goes home

Yehuda Ya'akov, consul for media and public affairs at the Israeli Consulate in New York, is returning to Jerusalem to work on arms control issues in the Foreign Ministry. On Thursday, Ya'akov told journalists and Jewish leaders that during his childhood in New York he never dreamed that one day he would "stand here in Israel's PR trenches, working 16 hours a day."

House passes charitable choice bill; Jewish groups warn of discrimination

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A charitable choice bill passed by the House of Representatives breaks down the separation between church and state and allows for religious-based hiring discrimination, many Jewish groups warn.

The bill, passed Thursday by a vote of 233-198, would let religious groups get direct federal funding for a range of social service programs.

The Anti-Defamation League called the bill "the most seriously flawed and constitutionally objectionable 'charitable choice' legislation that has ever reached the House floor."

Not all Jewish groups were opposed to the bill. Groups such as the Orthodox Union supported the legislation, which will provide direct government funding to churches and synagogues for their work in areas such as drug treatment and homeless services.

Backers argue that the bill provides critical protection for people seeking services. They also say religious organizations need to retain their essential character, and should be permitted to take religious views into account in hiring.

ADL, Hadassah: the Women's Zionist Organization of America and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs claim the bill may open religious institutions to government scrutiny, and does not provide safeguards against proselytizing.

"It is unconscionable, unconstitutional and unacceptable to force those seeking federal services to submit to proselytizing missionaries," said Hannah Rosenthal, JCPA's executive director. Opponents of the bill mounted a significant grass-roots effort within the Jewish community and a lobbying effort on Capitol Hill.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said that even those lawmakers who voted against the bill recognize the validity of the concerns raised by Jewish groups.

The Senate, expected to take up the issue in the fall, is likely to be tough on the bill, especially on the erosion of federal protections against hiring discrimination.

In a statement, President Bush praised the House for its work and said government should encourage faith-based groups. Bush urged the Senate to support the bill.

"If these good people are acting based on the calling of their faith, we should respect and welcome them, and never stand in their way," he said.

The House bill, also known as the Community Solutions Act of 2001, contains some attempts at compromise.

To avoid proselytizing, for example, the bill calls on organizations to provide secular alternatives to service recipients who request them. Just how such requests will be implemented and monitored is unclear, however.

The bill provides a big boost to the White House, which has been touting its faith-based initiative since the 2000 election campaign.

The White House did moderate its position somewhat over the past several months, but never fully backed away from the charitable choice initiative.

Supporters of the bill say it allows faith-based organizations to maintain their religious character and levels the playing field for small churches that have lost funding to larger, well-established religious charities.

The Democrats, who were only allowed one substitute amendment rather than open debate on a number of points, pushed a different bill they said would prohibit employment discrimination, prohibit the use of vouchers for services and protect recipients from religious coercion.

That substitute failed, as did the Democrats' motion to amend the bill to prohibit discrimination.

Democrats said religious groups that accept federal money should not be allowed to discriminate against someone based on religion.

Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) said language in the bill pre-empts state and local anti-discrimination laws.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said her Catholic education taught her to follow the Gospel of Matthew and help the needy, but the bill is problematic.

"Today this House will vote to legalize discrimination as we minister to the needs of the poor," Pelosi said. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

As Argentine bombing is marked, Jews skeptical of upcoming trial*By Nicolas Penchaszadeh*

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The speeches at the annual commemoration of a still-unsolved bombing of the city's major Jewish community center were familiar — survivors, victims' relatives and community leaders clamored for justice and denounced corruption and cover-ups in the investigation.

But Wednesday's ceremony for the 1994 car bombing, which killed 85 people and left hundreds wounded, took place amid news that 20 people accused of providing the bombing vehicle will be put on trial.

The trial is scheduled to begin Sept. 24 and last at least a year. The defendants include former high-ranking police officers and a used car dealer.

Great expectations have been placed on the trial, but many are skeptical that it will provide any real answers.

"The world will witness the closure of the AMIA case, but not the judgment of the real murderers, the masterminds, the accomplices or those who covered up the investigation," said Diana Malamud of Memoria Activa, the more militant of the two AMIA victims' groups, during their weekly rally Monday in front of the Federal Court building.

Skepticism about the trial follows long-term criticism of the investigation into the AMIA bombing — and into the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy here — for moving slowly and for failing to follow important leads.

"It is shameful for Argentina that the investigation has had such meager results," said Jose Hercman, president of DAIA, the Jewish umbrella organization. "The case has been plagued by errors, deceptions and cover-ups."

Unlike last year, President Fernando de la Rúa did not attend the memorial event. But he met privately with Jewish leaders at the AMIA building on the eve of the anniversary. Most Cabinet members and many other government officials were present, but de la Rúa's absence did not go unnoticed.

After welcoming de la Rúa's pledges a year ago, the Jewish community is increasingly disappointed by the lack of progress in the investigation. A general economic and political crisis has made government officials the target of several protests.

Many community members were outraged that instead of attending the bombing commemoration, de la Rúa visited a Toyota plant for the launching of a new vehicle.

De la Rúa said he would not attend the ceremony "so as not to create logistical problems."

"My government is committed to finding justice in this case," de la Rúa said. "This was an attack at our nation's heart."

The president's promise to "make the case a matter of state and to give full support to the investigation has so far been very insufficient," said Luis Czyzewski, who spoke for victims' families at the rally.

Last year de la Rúa became the first Argentine president to attend the anniversary, a gesture avoided by former President Carlos Menem. Menem currently is under house arrest, accused of supervising the illegal sale of weapons to Croatia and Ecuador when the two countries were under an arms embargo. That case, which has captured the national attention, has been linked to the AMIA and embassy bombings. □

Jewish groups want Bush to prioritize restitution issue*By Sharon Samber*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some Jewish leaders want the Bush administration to appoint a higher-profile representative to address Holocaust restitution issues, particularly outstanding claims against Holocaust-era insurers.

"That's the way the administration will signal" its involvement, said Israel Singer, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress and vice president of the Claims Conference. "That's the way it should be done."

The comments come as U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage reaffirmed the United States' commitment to Holocaust restitution this week in the administration's first public statement on the issue.

"Our government will continue to work for the interests of Holocaust victims and against anti-Semitism and racism," Armitage said.

"Of overriding importance, the U.S. government will continue to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research."

Armitage made his comments at a Claims Conference meeting in Washington on Wednesday.

In his speech, Armitage also praised the Claims Conference, which is marking its 50th anniversary this week, calling it "an essential partner" in Holocaust restitution.

The Claims Conference represents world Jewry in negotiations on compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs.

Armitage's presence at the meeting was a "powerful statement," but a higher-profile appointment on Holocaust restitution issues would be "encouraging," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

But James Bindenagel, the Bush administration's special envoy on Holocaust issues, said a high-profile appointment would not signal any additional U.S. involvement.

"It's not appropriate," he told JTA.

A high-profile appointee, like the Clinton administration's Stuart Eizenstat, was necessary when the United States was negotiating agreements with Switzerland, Germany, Austria and France, Bindenagel said. Now that the agreements are being implemented, however, the same type of involvement is not required, he said.

The next issue in the restitution process is to pressure German insurance companies to pay out funds to Holocaust survivors.

Some of this insurance money would come from a \$5 billion fund set up earlier this year mainly to pay slave and forced laborers — but most of it will come from an international commission established by insurance companies to pay policies taken out during the Holocaust era, said Jewish leaders.

Lawrence Eagleburger, chairman of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, spoke to the Conference earlier in the week and accused the German insurer Allianz of failing to make good on its commitments to the commission.

"It's unacceptable that it's business as usual," Singer said.

At their meeting, the Claims Conference's board of directors also decided to develop a long-term plan to ensure critical home care and other related needs of elderly Nazi victims. The Conference currently spends \$21 million annually to fund home care for the neediest cases. □