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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush, Arafat won't meet

President Bush will not meet Yasser Arafat at the United Nations this weekend, a top American official said. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice cited the Palestinian leader's failure to crack down on terrorism.

"There are responsibilities that come with being the representative of the Palestinian people, and that means to make certain that you do everything you can to lower the level of violence," Rice said Thursday. "These are responsibilities that we have asked Chairman Arafat to take and to take seriously. We still don't think there has been enough in that regard."

Rice also made reference to Arafat's willingness to support the U.S.-led crackdown on international terrorism while supporting terror at home. "You cannot help us with Al Qaida and hug Hezbollah" and Hamas, Rice said. "That's not acceptable."

Forum may criticize Israel

Switzerland will reconvene a forum on international humanitarian law that likely will target Israel for criticism. The Fourth Geneva Convention will meet Dec. 5 in Geneva.

Soon after the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, the Swiss Foreign Ministry received requests to formally convene such a meeting — last held in 1999 — both from "contracting parties" to the convention and the U.N. General Assembly, a Swiss legal expert said.

The United States contested a formal meeting, maintaining that it likely would be one-sided against Israel and counterproductive to curbing Israeli-Palestinian violence. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations called the decision to convene the meeting "obscene" and "outrageous."

U.S. Red Cross backs Israel

The American Red Cross reaffirmed its support for Israel's humanitarian relief agency.

The chairman of the American Red Cross, David McLaughlin, said his group would continue to withhold dues from the international parent body until Israel's Magen David Adom is admitted to the movement.

The former president of the American Red Cross, Dr. Bernadine Healy, said she recently resigned because she struggled with her board over her decision to withhold the dues.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Falling identification as Jews has Jewish leaders concerned

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — A new study reporting decreased identification with Judaism and rising intermarriage rates is generating concern, but not shock, in the Jewish community.

Instead, many leaders see the new findings, released last week, as a continuation of trends reported in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. Rather than viewing the study as a call to radically change course, most see it as a signal to step up existing efforts to strengthen Jewish continuity.

For some, that will come through day school education and making synagogues more spiritually meaningful to people. For others, it means support for nonreligious forms of Jewish expression — such as social action and the arts — that will appeal to people not interested in studying texts or going to synagogue services.

The American Jewish Identity Survey 2001 is an unofficial follow-up to the 1990 survey, conducted by three researchers who were involved in the original study.

Preliminary findings were released last week. The researchers — Egon Mayer, Ariela Keysar and Barry Kosmin — are still analyzing the data and expect to offer more details in coming months, particularly about intermarriage and how children of intermarriages are raised.

The study is part of a larger examination of religion in America.

A larger and more comprehensive study of American Jews, National Jewish Population Survey 2000, is being conducted under the auspices of the North American Jewish federation system and will be released this summer.

As Jewish leaders analyze the new study, many say its importance depends on how one determines who is Jewish. The study's estimate of 5.5 million American Jews — of whom 1.4 million identify as members of another religion — includes people who say they are Jewish or of Jewish upbringing or parentage.

Some observers say it would be less surprising for a person with one Jewish parent and who was raised with no religion — or even raised as a Christian — to reject Judaism than for a person who was raised Jewish. Such distinctions are impossible to make from the findings reported so far.

But the study does report that even among people who identify Judaism as their religion, 42 percent profess a secular outlook and 14 percent say they do not believe in God. In contrast, only 15 percent of Americans describe their outlook as secular.

It also finds that while only half of American Jews are affiliated with a synagogue or Jewish community organization, most identify with a stream of Judaism. Thirty percent identify with the Reform movement, 24 percent with the Conservative movement, 8 percent with Orthodoxy, 1 percent with Reconstructionism and 1 percent with Secular Humanism.

Six percent used self-generated labels like "liberal" or "atheist," and 20 percent declined to identify with any label or branch of Judaism.

Yet the findings are contradicted by other measures that would seem to show that interest in Judaism is higher than ever.

Enrollment at Jewish day schools is up, and scores of new schools have been founded in the past few years. Sales of books on Judaism are up.

Adult Jewish education courses — including structured text-study programs that require two-year commitments — are proliferating. Jewish summer camps have long waiting lists of prospective campers. In addition, the Reform movement — which once

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arab bomber dies in explosion

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up in his West Bank hideout. The bomber detonated the explosives after spotting an Israeli anti-terror squad closing in on him early Thursday.

The explosion wounded two members of the squad. Israeli security forces had been on high alert after receiving warnings that a Palestinian was en route to Israel with plans to carry out a suicide bombing. The alert was called off after the explosion.

More Palestinian terror predicted

The number of terror attacks against Israelis may soon escalate, Israel's defense minister said. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer also predicted a possible attack with non-conventional weapons, including anthrax.

The Palestinian Authority is using terrorism "as a strategy," he said Thursday.

U.S. applauds IDF withdrawal

The United States applauded Israel's latest troop withdrawal. "I am pleased that the Israelis have withdrawn from Ramallah, and I hope they will withdraw from the other villages in the near future," U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said Wednesday, referring to two West Bank cities where Israeli troops remain after an anti-terror crackdown last month.

Israel said there would be more withdrawals in the coming days if Palestinian violence subsides.

U.S. may seek Lebanon sanctions

The United States is demanding that Lebanon freeze the assets of Hezbollah. The move comes after Lebanon's prime minister, Rafik Hariri, said Thursday he would not comply with the U.S. call.

During a meeting with Hariri, the U.S. ambassador to Beirut, Vincent Battle, replied that Washington would explore the possibility of U.N. action against Lebanese financial institutions.

rejected many customary Jewish practices — is increasingly embracing traditional ritual and observance.

Rabbi David Ellenson, president of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, said the findings of the survey do not contradict the other evidence. Modern American life, Ellenson said, has had a dual effect on Jewish identity. On the one hand, acceptance has triggered high rates of assimilation and intermarriage, but it also has "caused other Jews to seek identity and community."

"On the one hand is a return to tradition, but against a backdrop of American religiosity, where individuals construct their own sense of meaning and look to tradition not as commanding, but for resources to seek meaning in their own lives," Ellenson said.

Jonathan Woocher, president of the Jewish Education Service of North America and the chief professional of the Jewish federation system's Renaissance and Renewal Pillar, agreed with Ellenson that there is "nothing surprising" in the new study.

"This is what one would have expected, given everything else we've seen in what's happening in Jewish life," Woocher said. "There's nothing here that says, 'Whoa, we're really on the wrong track,'" he said.

Instead, he said, the findings point to a "diverse population" and illustrate the need for a variety of approaches to engage Jews in Jewish life.

Rabbi Nina Cardin, director of Jewish life at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore and author of two guides to Jewish observance and rituals, said the findings — particularly the low rates of organizational affiliation and religious views — show the need to broaden outreach efforts beyond day schools and synagogues.

While education and synagogues remain important, Cardin said, the organized Jewish community needs to step up support for Jewish social action, environmental and cultural activities. These arenas are "begging for our increased attention," and attract "a lot of Jews who will not walk into a synagogue or Torah study class," Cardin said.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, the president of Yeshiva University, called the findings "tragic," saying they show the need for more Jewish education.

Lamm called for strengthening the commitment of Jews already involved in Jewish life by spending more money on Jewish day schools, so the schools can accommodate more students and pay better salaries.

Bethamie Horowitz, a social psychologist who serves on the technical advisory committee for NJPS 2000, called the findings "provocative." The study shows that "the audience for religious Judaism" appears to be "smaller than we thought," Horowitz said.

But, she said, it corroborates her findings from a recent study of New York Jews, called "Connections and Journeys."

That study found that Jewish identity is fluid and that people report very individual ways of and reasons for being Jewish, many of them not traditional or religious.

"Religious Judaism is one way of being Jewish, but not the only way," she said.

"Is it the best way? Does it have the longest shelf life? Those are questions that this study raises, but doesn't address," she said. "But some will say that those who have religious identifications are going to have stronger possibility of transmitting that to the next generation."

The study's funder, Felix Posen, said it suggests that secular Jews and those not affiliated with synagogues are a significant segment of the community, and cannot "be dismissed as if their number were insignificant or vestigial."

However, not all are convinced that findings of a low level of Jewish religiosity are so significant. Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, said that members of other faiths may have different definitions of what it means to be religious, and that Jews may say they are secular or have a secular outlook simply because they are not Orthodox.

Often, people will say they are secular, but "if you press further and ask do you attend synagogue, do you pray, some of these secular people will answer yes," Wertheimer said.

"I don't know of anybody who has written off secular Jews. That's not the issue," Wertheimer said in response to Posen's comments. "What came out of the 1990 population study was very powerful evidence that secular Jews who do not participate in organized religious life of the Jews are the least likely to successfully transmit strong Jewish identity to their children." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Survivors: Claims process lagging

The Holocaust insurance claims process is under fire. Holocaust survivors and members of the U.S. Congress accused the international commission charged with resolving Holocaust-era insurance claims with being too slow and not getting money to policy-holders.

At a hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Government Reform Committee on Thursday, the International Commission of Holocaust-era Insurance Claims was called a "failure." Lawmakers called for a quick end to the claims process and an extension of the February 2002 deadline for filing claims.

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, ICHEIC's chairman, acknowledged weaknesses in the commission's work and said he would try to extend the filing deadline.

U.S. judge backs Yahoo

Yahoo does not have to comply with a French court order regarding Nazi-related content, a U.S. judge said.

The judge ruled Wednesday after a French court ordered Yahoo to prevent French users from accessing a broad range of Nazi-related material on its Web site.

The U.S. judge said that U.S. free-speech rights cannot be overruled by foreign countries that have more restrictive laws on freedom of expression.

Israel Studies chair created

Brandeis University is establishing what it believes is the first Israel Studies chair in the United States. The endowed faculty position was established with a donation from Karl, Harry and Helen Stoll of Long Island, N.Y.

Czech loses 'Mein Kampf' case

A Czech publisher lost his appeal for publishing a Czech translation of Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

As a result of the decision this week, Michael Zitko faces a three-year suspended prison sentence and \$50,000 fine for his decision last year to publish the book, in which Hitler spelled out his racist ideology, without footnotes or disclaimers.

Century-old mikvah found in N.Y.

A 100-year-old mikvah was found beneath the streets of New York. The Jewish ritual bath was found beneath a vacant lot near the Eldridge Street Synagogue on the city's Lower East Side.

"This important discovery will help us better portray the day-to-day lives of immigrant Jews" at the start of the 20th century, said Amy Waterman, executive director of the Eldridge Street Project, which sponsored the excavation.

Surveys show strong Jewish ties to Israel, America after Sept. 11

By Amy Sara Clark

NEW YORK (JTA) — American Jews are more likely than Americans overall to think the Israeli-U.S. relationship had something to do with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to results in two recent polls.

But some say the results merely reflect differences in the questions asked.

A survey taken for the Forward newspaper found that 44 percent of U.S. Jews believe the attacks were "at least partly" due to "America's support of Israel."

Meanwhile, a survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that only 22 percent of Americans believe the attacks were related to U.S.-Israel ties.

American Jews are more aware of U.S.-Israel ties and therefore more likely to cite them as a reason for the Sept. 11 attacks, Jewish observers say.

"It's not surprising that Jews would perhaps be more sensitive to, or pick up on, any implication of a linkage to Israel," because they follow reporting on U.S.-Israel ties more carefully, said Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

But an official with the Anti-Defamation League said differences in the way the questions were asked account for some of the discrepancy.

The ADL survey forced respondents to choose between two statements: "If the U.S. were not such a close ally of Israel, the September 11 attacks on American would not have occurred," or "The terrorists attacked the U.S. because they don't like our values or way of life, not because of our relationship with Israel."

The Forward survey, on the other hand, asked if the attacks were "at least partly as a result of America's support of Israel." "Our survey was much more black and white," said Ken Jacobson, the ADL's associate national director.

Other results of the Forward survey include:

- American Jews were evenly split over whether Israel should heed Bush's call for restraint in fighting Palestinian terrorism, but strongly supported — by a 61 percent to 38 percent margin — American Jewish groups' strong rejoinder to Bush.

- More American Jews feel attached to Israel since the attacks on New York and Washington. The proportion of Jews who said they feel "somewhat" or "very" attached to Israel rose from 72 percent last January to 82 percent in late October, while the proportion saying they are "not attached" to Israel fell from 27 percent to 18 percent.

- American Jews feel both more Jewish and more American since Sept. 11. Just about 44 percent of respondents said they feel "more in touch" with their Jewish identities as a result of the Sept. 11 attacks, and 74 percent feel their identities as Americans were strengthened.

J.J. Goldberg, editor in chief of the Forward, said the survey is important because it shows the Jewish-American point of view. "We've been hearing about the American point of view and the Israeli point of view, but this is a view that is distinct from both of them," he said. "American Jews really are of two minds about the upcoming confrontation. They are not simply on Israel's side."

The survey, which was designed by Hebrew University sociologist Steven M. Cohen, polled a representative sample of 606 American Jewish adults between Oct. 28 and Oct. 30. The margin of error was plus or minus 6 percent.

The ADL survey of 500 American adults revealed the following:

- The American people overwhelmingly blame the violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the Palestinians. Forty-two percent of those surveyed blamed the Palestinians, while only 13 percent blamed Israel.

- The public supports Israel's right to use force to defend itself against terrorism. By a margin of 46 to 34 percent, Americans reject the notion that Israel should limit its use of force.

- A third of respondents are critical of Israel's policy of "assassinating" Palestinian militants, but — given American tactics in its war in Afghanistan — 43 percent think American criticism of Israel on this point is hypocritical.

The ADL survey was conducted on Oct. 30-31. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percent. □

UJC's Israel campaign focuses on solidarity missions, fund raising

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the United Jewish Communities unveiled its "Israel Now and Forever" program several months ago, a key component was a very public expression of solidarity in the shape of a massive Sept. 24 rally in New York.

But Sept. 11 dashed those plans to stand up for Israel as it confronted a year of Palestinian violence and terrorism.

With the United States and New York transfixed by the search and rescue at Ground Zero, the rally was viewed as logistically impossible and politically sensitive.

Today, with Israel drawn into America's war on terrorism, the quandary affecting American Jewry's political wing also reverberates within the Jewish federation world: To what extent should American Jews publicly rally for Israel while the Bush administration is trying to maintain international — and Arab — support for its anti-terror coalition.

So the UJC, the federation system's umbrella organization, is instead focusing its attention on the other elements of the Israel Now campaign: keeping the community well-informed, solidarity trips to Israel and fund raising.

"We're living in complicated times," said Karen Shapira, chairwoman of the UJC's Israel and Overseas Pillar.

"We're not afraid of public expression; our concern is knowing the right time to make that expression."

Shapira added: "In considering the best ways for American Jews to help Israel today, one of the most meaningful ways historically and culturally has been to support Israel financially."

The UJC announced in early October that the federation system had raised \$66 million for the 2001-2002 Israel Now campaign, much of it committed before the Sept. 11 attacks.

Federations have since asked their donors to dig deeper, and have raised an additional \$19 million through this week.

In all, then, the North American federation system has so far raised an extra \$85 million for Israel, according to Michael Fischer, a UJC assistant vice president. Israeli diplomats, for their part, seem to appreciate the fine line American Jews are walking.

"The community has been extremely responsible and measured in its public responses to everything that has happened since Sept. 11," said Alon Pinkas, consul general of the Israeli Consulate in New York.

"American Jews are first and foremost American, despite the tremendous importance that Israel plays in their lives. As Americans, they not only experienced and felt Sept. 11, but their collective response has been American, in terms of supporting their president and feeling that they have become as vulnerable as others."

The spending priorities for Israel today are a mix of the traditional and the circumstantial.

American Jewish money has long gone toward making up Israel's shortfall in spending on social services, due to heavy investment in military and defense; financial and psychological assistance to victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and absorption of Jewish immigrants.

Nowadays, the Jewish Agency for Israel and others are also asking for cash to bolster security for certain Jewish communities on the front lines of the yearlong Palestinian intifada.

This would come in the form of armored vehicles for public

transportation, bulletproof ambulances and bulletproof windows in places like Gilo, which regularly comes under fire from neighboring Beit Jalla.

Meanwhile, as Israelis continue to ask Diaspora Jews, "Where are you?" the UJC and others continue to urge Americans to visit Israel and show tangible solidarity with the Jewish state.

In one of the year's larger missions, organizers expect some 400 activists scheduled to attend the upcoming UJC General Assembly in Washington to fly to Israel once the five-day event ends on Nov. 13.

At the G.A. itself, the Israel Now campaign will be "inextricably intertwined," said UJC President Stephen Hoffman.

Several major sessions are slated to deal with Israel, including "A Year of Intifada"; "The Social Costs of the Matzav [Situation] in Israel"; "U.S.-Israel Relations in a Changing World"; and "Advocating for Israel During Crisis."

Still, some in the community believe enough time has elapsed since the Sept. 11 tragedy, and the needs of American Jews are well tended to; Israel must now return to the top of the communal agenda.

Some in the community still believe that public rallying for Israel is the way to go.

The reasons behind the Sept. 23 rally, they say, are just as valid today: to tell Israelis, "We are with you," to notify Washington that a vocal segment of the population demands continued U.S. support for Israel, and to provide Jews a venue to express their frustration.

Rabbi Avi Weiss, national president of AMCHA — The Coalition for Jewish Concerns, is planning to lead an interdenominational group of rabbis, spanning the religious spectrum, in a prayer vigil near the United Nations.

Weiss' message will be both pro-Israel and anti-terrorism — and emphasize the belief that Jerusalem and Washington share the same foe. Weiss has postponed his rally until Dec. 2 after a request from New York police.

Meanwhile, the UJC sees education as another way of supporting Israel and its policies.

Shoshana Cardin, a veteran communal leader and former chairman of the United Israel Appeal, said, for example, the UJC, through its Web site, should provide analysis from experts on the reasons behind Israel's reoccupation of Palestinian territory and Arafat's failure to arrest terrorists.

The community, Cardin said, must be able to respond effectively to media errors in observation or fact: "Israel is in a war of words, as well as a war of terrorism." □

Thanksgiving 'Haggadah' created

NEW YORK (JTA) — A U.S. Jewish group is distributing a Thanksgiving "Haggadah."

The American Jewish Committee's leaflet, which comes in response to the Sept. 11 terror attacks, asks participants at the traditional autumn meal to light a candle of hope and a memorial candle for the victims.

The booklet includes inspirational words from the Bible, rabbis and poets echoing the traditional Passover themes of freedom, includes an activity to involve children in the discussion and asks people to consider, Why is this Thanksgiving different? What have we lost? What have we learned? What do we tell our children? The publication is available at www.ajc.org. □