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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Children killed in Israeli attack

Two Palestinian boys were killed in an Israeli helicopter attack in Hebron. Israeli officials said the target of Monday's attack was a leader of Islamic Jihad, Mohammed Sidr, who was reportedly injured in the assault.

The leader of Palestinian militias in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti, called the killing of the 3- and 13-year-old boys an "ugly crime" and called on the United States to condemn it.

The helicopter strike came one day after Israel's Security Cabinet approved more military strikes against Palestinian targets.

High court backs religious rights

Ohio can be sued for cutting the beard of a Jewish inmate, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled.

In another decision Monday, the justices chose to sidestep a challenge to a policy that allows student-led prayers at public high school graduations. [Page 3]

Bush lights the candles

President Bush lit a menorah in the White House. Bush said Monday that the White House is "the people's house, and it belongs to people of all faiths."

After lighting candles with children of Jewish White House staffers, he noticed one child wearing a yarmulke designed to look like a baseball and said, "That's my kind of guy."

Truck explosion called accident

A truck explosion in the West Bank just before U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni's convoy passed by is being called an accident. Both Israeli and Palestinian officials both say the explosion, which killed the Palestinian driver, was not a terrorist bombing. The truck was carrying several gas canisters, according to Israel Radio.

In another development, Israeli and Palestinian officials urged Zinni not to return home.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met with Zinni on Monday to urge him to continue his peace-making mission, and Palestinian officials also publicly urged him to stay.

On Sunday, Zinni told both sides at Israeli-Palestinian security talks that he would consider ending his mission if there were no real progress toward a cease-fire within 48 hours.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Reform Jews voice angst as Israel battles terrorism

By Julie Wiener

BOSTON (JTA) — Myrna Cohen has gone from being a supporter of the Oslo peace process to someone who doesn't see "how you can negotiate with people who don't value life."

Cohen, a member of Temple Emanu-El in San Jose, Calif., was one of almost 6,000 Reform Jews gathered at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' biennial here last week. "I'm more right wing than I was," Cohen said, adding a few minutes later, "I feel more right and righteous."

Meeting in Boston in the days following two deadly terrorist attacks in Israel plus a smaller suicide bombing just down the street from their movement's seminary in Jerusalem, many Reform Jews were wary of the Palestinians and uncertain about the prospects for peace.

Politics aside, most expressed concern for Israelis and sadness that the situation seems so bleak right now.

"It's very painful," said Jerry Mann of Temple Beth El in Fresno, Calif.

Reform Jews tend to be among the most left wing of American Jews when it comes to Israel.

But now, after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States and more than a year of Palestinian uprising — including some of the most deadly terrorist attacks Israel has ever experienced — Reform Jews, like other Jews, are taking a harder line than they once did.

That shift has been evident in the rhetoric of Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the UAHC's president. Yoffie has long been an advocate for peace and has been vocal in calling for a freeze on Israeli settlements, even earlier this year, when other U.S. Jewish leaders were hesitant to publicly criticize the Israeli government.

But as part of his Shabbat morning sermon — which is considered the centerpiece of the biennial, Yoffie called Islamic radicalism "the Nazism of our day."

"Are the Palestinians suffering?" he asked. "Yes, of course. And it pains us deeply. But before we can respond to their suffering, we must prevent suffering and bereavement in our own homes."

Yoffie reiterated his movement's support for peace, negotiations and a two-state solution with Jews and Palestinians "sharing the Land of Israel." He did not mention Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But he also called on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to recognize that "you can have terrorism or a state, but you cannot have both. And if you choose a state, the only way to get there is to stop the violence and begin to negotiate."

In an interview, Rabbi David Ellenson, president of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, said, "The number of Reform Jews who no longer believe Arafat is a trustworthy peace partner has grown."

However, he noted, that is "different from saying Reform Jews support settlements."

"Most Reform Jews think the settlements are impediments to peace but don't see them as the cause" of the ongoing violence against Israel, he said.

The views of many participants at the biennial seemed to reflect those of Ellenson and Yoffie, although many described their views as constantly changing, with the situation too overwhelming and confusing for them to advocate any particular position.

Reform Jews are "very disturbed by what's going on and don't see a way out," said

MIDEAST FOCUS

E.U. presses Arafat on terrorists

The European Union branded Hamas and Islamic Jihad "terrorist networks."

E.U. foreign ministers meeting in Brussels issued a statement Monday that called on the Palestinian Authority to dismantle the two groups, arrest and try terror suspects, and issue a "public appeal in Arabic for an end to the armed intifada."

The ministers also called on Israel to "withdraw its armed forces and stop extra-judicial killings" of suspected Palestinian terrorists, "lift the closures and restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people, freeze settlement" activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and "end the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure."

Arabs asked to slam TV show

Arab leaders are being asked to denounce an anti-Semitic television series.

The Anti-Defamation League is making the call as many Egyptian television stations plan to air a 30-part dramatic series based on the 19th-century forgery "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which details a purported Jewish plot to rule the world.

The series, "Horseman Without a Horse," portrays the book as fact. The series was produced by Arab Radio and Television of Saudi Arabia.

Israel refuses terrorists' truce

Israel rejected a truce offered by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The military wings of the two terrorist organizations and two groups affiliated with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement made the offer Sunday.

They said they would halt attacks within Israel for a week if Israel stopped its policy of targeted assassinations, bombings and other military actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

An Israeli official said the offer was refused, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Arthur Obermayer, of Temple Shalom of Newton, in suburban Boston.

"I don't think most people in the Reform movement support Sharon's approach, but it's the only game in town," Obermayer said, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The biennial sponsored sessions on peace in Israel, including one that featured a Palestinian journalist, the president of the New Israel Fund, a group that funds progressive causes in Israel, and the executive director of Rabbis for Human Rights, a group that has generated controversy in recent months for helping Palestinians re-plant olive trees destroyed by the Israeli army.

However, according to one participant, many audience members "were extremely mistrustful" of the Palestinian speaker.

And an activist for Rabbis for Human Rights said he was having more trouble generating support than he had at previous Reform gatherings.

Plenaries that addressed Israel featured dovish leaders like Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg and Yuli Tamir, the minister of absorption under former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Many participants said they still hope for an eventual two-state solution, one in which Israel evacuates most of its settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

"I certainly don't want to give up on negotiations and the idea of a peace process, but Israel has to do what it has to do," said Madeline Dreifus of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, N.J.

"When they ask for seven days of no terrorism, I don't think that's asking too much," Dreifus said, referring to Sharon's timetable before any negotiations can happen.

While the bad news from Israel was discussed frequently at plenaries and in the halls, the overall mood at the conference was high.

People were elated that in the aftermath of Sept. 11 attacks, which has made many Americans reluctant to travel, the biennial attracted 5,800 people, its largest crowd ever.

Concern over Israel hardly crowded out other issues. When asked what issues they wanted to explore at the biennial, participants spoke of prayer, education, and synagogue management more than they mentioned Israel. An Israel solidarity rally Dec. 5 that was jointly sponsored by the UAHC and local Jewish groups drew a relatively small number of biennial participants, although it took place at Copley Square, just a few blocks from the convention center where the biennial was held.

In contrast, ma'ariv services that occurred simultaneously in the hotel — the first time the Reform biennial had hosted weekday evening prayers — drew several hundred people, far more than organizers had anticipated.

It was an interesting moment for a movement traditionally known more for its rallies and social action than its focus on spirituality and prayer.

For years, critics from other movements and some Israeli leaders have accused the Reform movement of not emphasizing Israel enough in its programs and doing enough to show solidarity with Israel.

Last summer, when the UAHC became the only major national group to cancel its teen trips to Israel, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert vowed to have no further contact with the Reform movement, a vow he soon broke to speak to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion students in Jerusalem.

Next summer, the UAHC plans to resume teen trips, but will focus on kibbutz programs rather than travel programs and expects only a few hundred participants, compared with the approximately 1,500 it had sent in previous years.

Some have speculated that its intense fight for religious pluralism in Israel in the 1990s undermined rank-and-file support for Israel, conveying the impression to Reform Jews that they were unwelcome in Israel. Nonetheless, most people interviewed at the biennial voiced strong support for Israel, particularly at this time of crisis.

But several, like Mitchell Feinberg of Temple Beth Ahava in Muskogee, Okla., said they were hurt that Reform conversions are not officially recognized in the Jewish state.

Feinberg, whose mother had a Reform conversion before he was born, said he has been "pretty pro-Israel all my life" and was pleased "to hear a strong endorsement of Israel" at the biennial.

But he worries that the country he defends does not recognize him as Jewish. "It's very insulting — you spend your life as a Jew in the South defending your religion only to have the State of Israel turn around and say you're not Jewish enough." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Former envoy blasts U.N.

A former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said U.N. criticisms of Israel are rarely "true" or "fair." Jeane Kirkpatrick's remarks were made Sunday night at the American Jewish Committee's annual U.N. Watch dinner, which honored Jewish philanthropist Edgar Bronfman.

The event came one day before the U.N. and its secretary-general, Kofi Annan, were given the Nobel Peace Prize. Many Jewish leaders fear the award to the world body will add new credibility to an organization they believe is biased. Kirkpatrick praised Annan for his work as secretary general.

Berlin museum sets record

Berlin's new Jewish Museum has become the most-visited museum in Germany, according to its director. W. Michael Blumenthal said this week that more than 217,000 visitors have passed through the halls of the building designed by architect Daniel Libeskind since the museum opened in September. In another development, German culture minister, Julian Nida-Rumelin, was elected president of the museum's newly established Foundation Council.

Other council members include Jewish leader Paul Spiegel and Michael Naumann, a former culture minister who is now a newspaper publisher.

Jewish woman becoming colonel

A Baltimore-area woman is being promoted to full colonel in the Army Corps of Veterinarians.

Michelle Ross' promotion makes her the first Jew to achieve the rank of colonel in the 150-year history of the corps, according to the Baltimore Jewish Times. Since Sept. 11, Ross has been working to develop counter-measures against chemical warfare agents.

Menorah lit at Ground Zero

A menorah was lit at the site of the World Trade Center attack. Laura Lehrfeld, who is 18 months old and lost her father when the twin towers collapsed, lit the menorah's first candle Sunday night.

Rescue workers and several family members of victims of the Sept. 11 terror attack gathered after sunset near the rubble of the World Trade Center for the ceremony. A similar ceremony will take place each of the next seven nights of Chanukah.

In Washington, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz lit the national Chanukah menorah. Hundreds attended Sunday's event, sponsored by American Friends of Lubavitch. The menorah, which stands on the Ellipse in front of the White House, has been lit for the past 22 years.

Lubavitch sponsored similar ceremonies in numerous cities around the world, including New York, Jerusalem, Paris, London and Moscow.

Supreme Court allows inmate to sue state for cutting of beard

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Supreme Court's decision this week to enable an Orthodox prisoner to sue the state of Ohio for cutting his beard signals a step forward for the religious rights of U.S. inmates.

The high court refused to block a lawsuit brought by HBrandon Lee Flagner, who maintains that an Ohio prison grooming regulation violated his constitutional right to practice his religion. Flagner, who became a Chasidic Jew while imprisoned for the murder of an 8-year-old girl, brought the lawsuit after prison officials twice cut his beard and sidelocks.

The case was one of two of Jewish interest in which the Supreme Court decided not to intervene on Monday. In the second case, the justices chose to sidestep a challenge to a policy that allows student-led prayers at public high school graduations.

Ohio is one of many states that requires prisoners to follow grooming rules intended to control drugs and gang activity.

The Supreme Court has in the past determined that prison regulations alleged to infringe constitutional rights are judged under a "reasonableness" test that is less restrictive than that ordinarily applied to alleged infringements of fundamental constitutional rights.

Monday's decision to let Flagner proceed with his lawsuit leaves prisoner advocate Isaac Jaroslawicz optimistic that courts are acknowledging basic freedoms for inmates.

"There needs to be respect for legitimate religious practices in the prison environment," said Jaroslawicz, the executive director of the Aleph Institute, a not-for-profit national organization that provides religious, educational, advocacy and humanitarian services to nearly 4,000 Jewish men and women in federal and state prisons.

Flagner was at times exempted from the prison's grooming regulations but his beard and sideburns were cut against his will in 1996 and 1998.

Abba Cohen, director and counsel of the Washington office of Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox organization, also lauded the decision.

Flagner won his right to his day in court, Cohen said, adding that it is right to put the burden on the state to make its case. But Betty Montgomery, Ohio's attorney general, has said Flagner's case could spark other inmate challenges to prison rules.

Attorneys for 20 other states that joined Ohio in its appeal urging the Supreme Court to consider the case said if exemptions are allowed, "the ability of prison officials to maintain security will inevitably falter, thereby placing the safety and welfare of prison staff, inmates, and the general public at risk."

Also Monday, the Supreme Court declined to take a case that argues student-led prayers at public high school graduations violate church-state separation.

Officials in Duval County, Fla., permit prayers at graduation ceremonies when the decision has been made by student referendum on the message of the graduation.

"This policy is designed to sneak prayer into school," said Steve Sheinberg, assistant director of legal affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

Sheinberg said the high court would probably wait for the issue to be more developed in other circuit courts before taking a case that would more clearly address the line between church-state separation and free speech rights of students.

Such policies are only in effect in Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

Observers say it is unlikely that many other school districts would want to adopt such a policy that gives students a platform to speak without school control. □

'Mein Kampf' translation blasted

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Bulgarian Jewish organization is criticizing the publication of a second Bulgarian translation of Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

"The emergence of these fascist politics must be condemned," said Bulgarian Jewish leader Emil Kalo. The first translation of Hitler's manifesto was banned last year. But in an attempt to avoid any legal action, the foreword to the new translation calls the book a work of history. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Robertson resignation leads some to question future of Christian right***By Sharon Samber*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the religious right in America struggles for its voice, one of its most important spokesmen has stepped down.

Pat Robertson resigned as president of the Christian Coalition on Dec. 5, leaving Jewish leaders to wonder just how potent a force fundamentalist Christianity will be in coming years.

Robertson left to focus on spiritual leadership, according to the Coalition.

It is time to "mobilize a whole new cohort of patriotic Americans to swell the ranks," Robertson said.

Even with Robertson at its helm, however, the power of the conservative Christian lobby waned in recent years.

The movement grew out of the grass-roots organization built during Robertson's failed 1988 bid for president. Its power peaked in the early- to mid-1990s, after it established itself by helping to rally voters behind conservative Republican candidates in local elections.

Since then, however, the movement has run into a number of problems that lead many to question its continued viability.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, predicted that Robertson's resignation will not make any difference to the Coalition's power — or lack thereof.

"Time has passed it by," Foxman said. "It peaked many years ago."

The ADL and the Christian Coalition have had a number of "sharp disagreements" over the years, Foxman said, but he said Robertson appeared to have softened recently and become more pluralistic.

Although Robertson did carve out a political role for religious fundamentalists, the movement never became as much of a national force as some once feared, Foxman said.

"The religious right is no longer significant," Foxman said. "I do not see them today as a potent political force."

Other Jewish leaders stressed that while the Christian Coalition has lost some credibility, it can't be written off entirely.

The public largely has repudiated the group's message, but the extreme right still has an influence on American life, said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

"I wouldn't underestimate its impact in many places in America," Baum said.

Financial problems, revelations that it inflated its membership numbers and the defeat of many candidates it supported have caused some people to all but dismiss the Coalition.

When Ralph Reed, the group's powerful director, left the organization in 1997, some observers wondered how the group could go on. The IRS also denied the group tax-exempt status, concluding that its political activities are too partisan.

The IRS ruling prompted the Coalition to split into two groups — Christian Coalition International, which endorses and makes financial contributions to candidates and is not tax exempt, and a second, tax-exempt group called Christian Coalition of America, which engages in voter education activities.

Despite his departure, the outspoken Robertson probably will continue to attract attention.

Robertson frequently incurred the anger of liberal groups with

sometimes outrageous accusations. For example, he has blamed the feminist agenda for leading women to lesbianism, and called Judeo-Christian moral values better than those of other cultures.

Baum noted that the Coalition may have more political potential now than in recent years, as the Bush administration is considered partial to aspects of the organization's message, such as government funding of social services provided by religious groups.

In addition, the role of religion in public life is at a peculiar stage right now.

After the Sept. 11 terror attacks, people increasingly invoked religion in the public arena and held public prayers.

While that phenomenon too may have peaked, some believe the current climate in the United States is still ripe for an increased visibility for religion.

Religious conservatives are believed to make up about 17 percent of the general population. In Congress, the Christian Coalition suffered many defeats as it tried to promote school prayer and stop abortion.

This year, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) is trying again to pass a school prayer amendment to the Constitution, but there is thought to be little congressional support for such a dramatic change to U.S. law.

An overwhelming majority of Americans believe that religion is increasing its influence on American life, according to a new poll, presented jointly by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

The poll shows that 78 percent of respondents say religion's influence in American life is growing, up from 37 percent eight months ago.

Still, Jewish groups seem certain that the Christian Coalition will not rise again to its former level of national importance. But it remains a force to be reckoned with, particularly at the grass-roots level, warned Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

On the issue of Israel, however, fundamentalist Christian groups find much common ground with American Jewry.

Although the Coalition never formally endorsed aid to Israel, Robertson supported Jerusalem as Israel's capital, basing his view on the Bible.

While Jewish groups often clashed with Robertson on church-state issues, they also joined together on some issues like international debt relief, and Robertson had respect for the Jewish community.

"He generally wanted the Jewish community to understand him better," Saperstein said. □

Annapolis to get synagogue

NEW YORK (JTA) — A campaign is under way to build a synagogue for Jewish midshipmen at the U.S. naval academy.

A campaign led by a group called Friends of the Jewish Chapel is raising \$10 million in private funds for the synagogue at Annapolis.

Organizers say they hope that Jewish students in the class of 2005 will be able to worship in the Commodore Uriah P. Levy Center and Jewish Chapel before they graduate.

Unlike Jewish students attending West Point and the Air Force Academy, who already have synagogues, midshipmen at Annapolis make do with a small, interfaith chapel. □