



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat: End the violence

Yasser Arafat called on the Palestinian people to end "all military activities" against Israel.

The Palestinian leader also said, "I renew the call to completely halt any activities, especially suicide attacks, which we have condemned and always condemned." [Page 3]

N.Y. militants under investigation

U.S. authorities are investigating Brooklyn-based followers of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane. News of the investigation into the Jewish militants, reported in *The New York Times*, came after two members of the Jewish Defense League in Los Angeles were charged last week with conspiring to bomb to blow up Arab and Muslim targets in Southern California.

The leader of the Brooklyn-based group, Michael Guzofsky, said U.S. agents are calling people on his Rolodex, and have called him in for fingerprinting. Guzofsky added that the U.S. government is conducting the investigation "to show evenhandedness and show they are not isolating Muslims" in the crackdown that has followed the Sept. 11 terror attacks. U.S. agents would not comment on the report.

Zinni returning home

U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni said he plans to continue seeking an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire. His mission is "not over yet," he said *Sunday en route* back to the United States.

Zinni is traveling to Washington for consultations and a vacation. Despite his comments, it is unclear when he will return to the Middle East. [Page 3]

U.S. vetoes U.N. resolution

The United States vetoed on Saturday a U.N. resolution dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian violence. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, said the Security Council resolution was aimed at isolating Israel.

The resolution, sponsored by Arab states, called for a "monitoring mechanism" to help end the violence. But it made no reference, Negroponte said, to Palestinian acts of terrorism or those responsible for them.

E.U. states were split on the resolution. Britain abstained in the Security Council vote, while France and Ireland backed the resolution.

Anthrax scare impedes ballots for upcoming Zionist elections

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The national fight against anthrax and terrorism is being blamed for delays and low interest in the upcoming elections for a group known as the "international Parliament of the Jewish people."

With fewer than 50,000 registration forms in — one-third the number for the last election — the U.S. elections committee for the World Zionist Congress recently extended its registration deadline to Jan. 18.

Many observers are blaming the low turnout so far — the registrations forms were originally to be due Dec. 14 — on the fact that American Jews have been distracted from internal issues in Israel.

The elections take place in March and determine who will sit on the World Zionist Congress, a group regarded as the official representative of Diaspora Jewry that determines the policies of the World Zionist Organization.

The WZO is significant because the group controls half the seats on the Jewish Agency for Israel, which has a \$350 million budget that focuses on aliyah and absorption, Jewish education and partnerships between Israel and Diaspora Jewish communities.

All Jews older than 18 are eligible to vote as long as they register ahead of time. Voters choose party slates rather than candidates.

The American elections determine 29 percent of the elected delegates to the Congress, which is slated to convene in Jerusalem in June.

The last elections in 1997 drew more attention than usual because they came amid controversy over the status of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel. The liberal movements encouraged their rank and file to express their concerns by participating in the elections, and they did so in record numbers.

As a result, the liberal streams won 74 percent of the American vote, the majority going to ARZA/World Union for Progressive Judaism, which represents the Reform and Reconstructionist movements.

The remaining votes were divided among Religious Zionists of America, which represents Orthodox Jews, and several secular Zionist groups aligned with Israeli parties, such as Likud and Labor.

The 1997 victory led to increased visibility and political clout for liberal Judaism in Israel as well as increased Jewish Agency allocations to Reform and Conservative institutions in Israel.

It is not clear whether this year's low registration will erode the liberal movements' clout in the World Zionist Organization or will be distributed evenly among the various slates.

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of ARZA, says he is still hoping to get as large a Reform turnout as in 1997.

"The fact that a lot has happened in the world doesn't diminish in any way the importance of these elections, which will determine who will most influence the long-lasting discussions in the Jewish world: the nature of Zionism, the nature of Israel-Diaspora relations, the questions of religious pluralism," he said.

The Reform movement's campaign platform is still about religious pluralism. A two-page advertisement in the current issue of *Reform Judaism* magazine declares that "Ultra-Orthodox politicians are threatening Jewish unity and Jewish continuity" and urges Reform Jews to register for the elections.

However, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel on high alert

Israeli troops surrounded several Palestinian villages in the West Bank. In an operation early Sunday morning, the troops also destroyed roads to foil suspected Palestinian terrorists.

The operation took place after a suicide bomber blew himself up Saturday night at an Israeli border checkpoint between Israel and the West Bank. He was suspected of trying to reach a mall in central Israel. There were no Israeli casualties in the attack.

Germany denies pressuring Israel

German and U.S. officials deny that German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer ever suggested cutting U.S. aid to Israel. A spokesperson for the German Embassy in Washington said such a recommendation would have contradicted decades of German support for Israel.

Last week, there were reports that Fischer made the suggestion to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell as a way to pressure Israel to reach a cease-fire with the Palestinian Authority.

Arafat unpopular in U.S.

Yasser Arafat is unpopular with 60 percent of Americans, a new poll shows. According to a new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll, 47 percent of Americans blame the Palestinians for the Middle East violence, compared to 13 percent who blame the Israelis. The results are more one-sided than a year ago, when 39 percent held the Palestinians responsible, according to pollster Peter Hart.

Scuba group accused of theft

Israeli officials are accusing a group of Scuba divers of stealing archaeological artifacts.

The officials recently nabbed a ring of undersea divers accused of stealing dozens of artifacts from the Mediterranean Sea, according to the Jerusalem Post.



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Congregations, acknowledged that congregants are less interested in religious pluralism and the Zionist elections than they were in 1997.

"Our congregational leaders and rabbis are working hard" to get out the vote, "but it doesn't resonate, not because people don't care about these issues but because other things are grabbing their attention," Yoffie said.

Still, the elections are not at the top of the movement's agenda either. At the Reform movement's biennial convention in Boston earlier this month — which drew more than 5,000 participants — religious pluralism was discussed, but not emphasized heavily.

Delegates were urged to help build and strengthen Reform Judaism in Israel, and a booth was set up to register people for the elections. However, the elections were hardly a central issue.

Yoffie said it is "hard to judge" whether Reform will lose seats or clout in the election.

"Obviously I hope we don't lose strength," he said. "The danger here is that this will be interpreted as meaning that" religious pluralism is "of no importance to American Jews, which is simply untrue."

"Nothing would be more disastrous now than for Israel to re-enter the religious wars and start passing coercive religious legislation," he said. In the past, legislative efforts such as ones to recognize only Orthodox conversions for converts from abroad drove a major wedge between Israel and American Jewry.

With religious pluralism less central — and with some seeing it as divisive at a time when Israel is in crisis — the Conservative movement's Mercaz is promoting broader platform than pluralism this year, said Rabbi Robert Golub, the group's executive director.

This year, Mercaz is promoting the elections as a way to support Israel and Zionism, Golub said. "Our primary slogan is, 'Cast a vote of support for Israel, register to vote,'" Golub said.

He said Mercaz is concerned that low participation in the election could be interpreted as a sign that American Jews are not interested in Israel.

Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, executive vice president of the Religious Zionists of America, an umbrella for several Orthodox groups including the Orthodox Union, said the low registration rates don't reflect people's interest in Israel or religious pluralism, but simply the fact that they are distracted by other issues.

The Religious Zionists of America, which favors Orthodox control over religious matters in Israel — such as conversion and marriages — won 12 percent of the American vote in 1997.

Ganchrow said that after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, he unsuccessfully urged the World Zionist Congress to postpone the elections.

"Now is not the time for the Conservative, Reform and Orthodox to be jockeying for position," he said. "Now's the time for unity."

With the election's moving ahead, Ganchrow is working hard to get out the vote. He said his group has been much more active in registering people than it was in 1997 when as president of the O.U., he had to "beg someone for a contribution to make a flyer" publicizing the elections.

Ganchrow recently spoke about the elections on a New York radio station that does Jewish programming and will send out 130,000 registration forms. "I don't know how successful we will be, but it's not for lack of trying," he said. □

(To register to vote in the elections, log on to www.azm.org or call (888) 874-2441 by Jan. 18. Registration costs \$4.)

Israel to help Afghanistan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel plans to join in an international effort to help Afghanistan after the war ends.

An official with the Israeli Foreign Ministry said last week that no firm proposals for Israeli aid were ready, but projects under consideration included setting up field hospitals, providing physical rehabilitation for the injured and developing water resources in arid areas.

The official also said Israeli and U.S. officials had shared intelligence information during the war. □

JEWISH WORLD

Federation helps 9/11 victims

The UJA-Federation of New York has joined 12 major New York charities to serve victims of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Unveiled last Friday, the 9/11 United Services Group will act as the central clearinghouse for help and information, providing victims with a hotline and personal caseworkers.

The organizations involved, which include the American Red Cross, are a cross-section of Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and secular agencies.

Islamic groups' assets frozen

Two Islamic groups denied links to terrorism after U.S. officials raided their offices and froze their assets.

Searching for evidence, FBI officials last Friday searched the premises of the Global Relief Foundation and the Benevolence International Foundation, both located in the Chicago suburbs.

Another search was conducted that day at a Benevolence International Foundation office located in Newark.

The two groups' assets were frozen "because the groups are suspected of funding terrorist activities," a spokesman for the U.S. Treasury Department said Saturday.

Clinton helps JNF raise money

President Clinton helped the Jewish National Fund raise some \$1.75 million. The money will be used to help build a reservoir in the Negev Desert.

The JNF centenary dinner, held Dec. 12 in London for more than 1,500 people, is believed to be the largest kosher event ever held in Britain.

Threats kill 'Potter' showing

The manager of a Paris theater canceled a special screening of "Harry Potter" for a group of Jewish children after receiving threats.

Guy Didier said he received over 300 telephoned threats and another 100 by e-mail, apparently related to the Mideast crisis, after the Jewish National Fund asked to rent the cinema to screen the film for 800 Jewish children.

Holocaust novelist dies

W.G. Sebald, an acclaimed German-born novelist who wrote about the Holocaust and memory, died last Friday in a car crash in England at 57.

Sebald's "The Emigrants" is about Jews who escaped the Holocaust, and "Austerlitz" focuses on a Holocaust survivor searching for his parents' identity. "The Holocaust was his preoccupation," scholar Jon Cook said of Sebald, who is a perennial candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature. Sebald taught in England for the past 30 years.

Arafat must live up to his word, U.S. and Israeli officials caution

By JTA Staff

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and U.S. officials are skeptical after Yasser Arafat cast himself this week in the role of peacemaker.

After more than a year of bloodshed, the officials are well aware that the Palestinian leader can talk the talk. Now they want to see if he can walk the walk.

The skepticism was prompted by a televised address Sunday in which Arafat called on the Palestinian people to end "all military activities" against Israel.

Speaking on Palestinian television, Arafat also said, "I renew the call to completely halt any activities, especially suicide attacks, which we have condemned and always condemned."

Arafat had some harsh words for Israeli officials, accusing them of "launching a brutal war" against the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, and urging them to return to peace talks.

In a warning to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Arafat said he would "only allow one authority" in the areas under his control.

"We must not allow anyone to shake the credibility" of the Palestinian Authority's "leadership and its decisions," he said.

He vowed to prosecute those who ignored his directives.

"We will punish all planners" of terror attacks, Arafat said. "We will hunt down the violators firmly."

Before his address, Palestinian officials closed dozens of offices in the West Bank and Gaza affiliated with Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

Soon after Arafat's address, however, there were indications that at least some Palestinian militants had their own interpretation of the speech.

According to Israel's Army Radio, militants affiliated with Arafat's Fatah movement said they planned to continue attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers.

Last week, the Israeli Cabinet labeled him "irrelevant" because of his inability to halt terrorism. Issuing the declaration after a terror attack on a bus in the West Bank that left 10 Israelis dead and another 30 injured, the Cabinet also said Israel would henceforth see to its own security needs.

Following the declaration, Israel launched a series of operations over the weekend in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in an effort to round up terrorists.

At least 10 Palestinians were reported killed during the weekend operations, in which Israel nabbed some 50 terror suspects.

After Arafat made the address, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israeli officials were going to take a wait-and-see approach to whether the Palestinian leader planned to put any teeth into his declarations.

"I must say, I have to be a little skeptical, because Arafat made these statements before," Ra'anana Gissin said. "I want to judge Arafat by his deeds, not by his words."

U.S. officials offered much the same reaction.

"They are constructive words, but what is important is that he now take concrete action," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said in a statement.

Arafat's speech came after U.S. officials recalled the Middle East envoy, former Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, for consultations in Washington.

On Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell blamed Palestinian violence for Zinni's departure from the Middle East.

"We sent Gen. Zinni over to try to get that dialogue going, and all of that was blown up by these terrorist organizations on the Palestinian side," Powell said on "Fox News Sunday."

Powell suggested it could be weeks before Zinni returns to the Middle East.

Powell also warned that if Arafat did not move against militants he would "slowly lose authority within the region."

Asked if Arafat would survive if Palestinian terror continues, Powell replied, "I don't know." He added that although Israel had declared Arafat irrelevant, the United States would still deal with Arafat as head of the Palestinian Authority.

But, Powell said, if Arafat fails to act decisively, "We will be examining all of our options of how we deal with him." □

Education bill gaining approval, while ignoring tuition vouchers

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With the overhaul of the federal education bill apparently complete, most Jewish groups are happy with what's missing — school vouchers.

Once a staple of the Bush administration's prescription for curing the public schools' woes, vouchers have been ignored by Congress. Yet they remain a controversial issue for the American Jewish community.

Jewish groups are unable to reach unanimity on the issue.

Most organizations say vouchers, which provide government funds for students to attend parochial or private schools, violate church-state separation and drain money away from the public school system.

However, Orthodox Jews, who typically send their children to Jewish day schools, support publicly financed tuition vouchers.

At the recent biennial conference of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president, spoke out strongly against school vouchers.

Yoffie said U.S. Jews remain supportive of the public school system, and noted that many Jews cannot afford day school tuition, which can run to \$15,000 per year.

"But we must not ask the government to do for our community what our community is unwilling to do for itself," Yoffie said in his speech.

Lawmakers dropped the issue of vouchers early in the congressional negotiations, much to the dismay of Orthodox groups.

The Orthodox Union says vouchers are made available on the basis of neutral criteria to the parents of all schoolchildren, and individual families would decide whether to spend the public dollars on parochial schools.

The Supreme Court is poised to rule on the constitutionality of school vouchers some time this spring.

Overall, Jewish groups are pleased with the education bill, which passed the House on Dec. 12 by a vote of 381-41. The Senate is expected to vote on it this week.

Still, another church-state issue in the bill is raising concern.

The bill empowers the Department of Education to issue a "guidance" on prayer in public schools. Guidelines on religion in public schools have been issued before, but the new guidance will have the force of law.

For the first time, the department could deny funds to any local school district that blocks a student's right to pray in school.

It is unclear what the guidance will say, when it will be issued and how closely it will match court rulings.

Some Jewish groups are unhappy with the change, saying it gives too much power to the Department of Education to decide what is constitutional, and that the threat of losing federal funds is coercive and inappropriate.

"This provision adds a layer of confusion and uncertainty to an already complicated area of the law," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Lieberman and others called the specter of a federal guidance "troubling," and plan to track the issue. They also will try to have input in developing the guidance.

Another part of the education bill, which was tied up for months in negotiations between the U.S. House of Representatives

and the Senate, authorizes education against hate crimes. The bill only authorizes the programs — maintaining the department's ability to do such programming — but does not determine actual funding amounts.

The bill also continues to mandate "equitable participation" in supplementary educational programs, such as teacher development and training programs, in nonpublic schools.

Another amendment that some Jewish groups find disconcerting says schools cannot deny equal access to the Boy Scouts, a group that excludes homosexuals as scout leaders.

Most Jewish groups condemned a Supreme Court ruling in June 2000 that allowed the Boy Scouts to exclude a gay scoutmaster.

School districts would find themselves threatened with the loss of federal funds if they are found to be denying the Boy Scouts an opportunity to meet.

"There are a number of specific amendments inserted in the bill to make political points," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

The overhaul of the education bill, also named the "Leave No Child Behind Act," is a major victory for President Bush, who made it one of his priorities and made education reform a top issue during his presidential campaign.

The bill, which will cost about \$172 billion over 10 years, will institute annual testing in third through eighth grades to measure students' progress in reading and math.

Also, children in schools with consistently poor performance could be eligible for private tutoring and other alternatives at public expense.

If the Senate approves the legislation, as expected, Bush could sign it into law as early as this week. □

Exhibit of Czech Judaica goes on display in Prague shul

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A priceless collection of silver Jewish artifacts has gone on permanent display in the Spanish Synagogue here.

The 200-piece exhibition, entitled "Synagogue Silver from Bohemia and Moravia" includes burial society objects including beakers, combs and implements for ritually cleansing the deceased, spice boxes, Chanukah menorahs and Torah ornaments.

Some of the artifacts are more than 500 years old.

The exhibition is part of a 6,000-piece collection of silver artifacts owned by the Jewish Museum in Prague, which said the objects provided an invaluable record of the region's Jewish history.

"This exhibition is rare because all of the items are from the area of Bohemia and Moravia," said Leo Pavlat, director of the Jewish Museum. "We wanted to have a permanent exhibition that would explain Jewish customs, history and traditions here through objects."

The collection started at the beginning of the 20th century, when Prague's Jewish Museum was created.

The museum's original mission was to preserve artifacts from Prague synagogues that were destroyed during the reconstruction of the Jewish part of the city at the turn of the century.

Items in the collection include a burial society beaker made in Augsburg between 1595 and 1600. □