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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Cheney, Sharon meet

Vice President Dick Cheney met with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem.

Before the meeting Monday, Cheney called upon Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat "to renounce once and for all the use of violence as a political weapon."

Cheney also said he would ask Sharon about alleviating "the devastating economic hardship being experienced by innocent Palestinian men, women and children." Cheney was to meet with Israel's Security Cabinet on Tuesday morning.

Meanwhile, Palestinian officials said they would boycott any meeting with Cheney that did not include Arafat.

Cheney had hoped to meet with high Palestinian Authority officials, but was not expected to meet Arafat during his 24 hours in the region. President Bush also has refused to meet the P.A. president because of his permissive attitude toward terrorism against Israel.

Israel to withdraw troops

Israel agreed to pull its troops out of Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip. The pullback, slated for Monday night, was agreed to in meetings between Israeli and Palestinian security officials that were mediated by U.S. peace envoy Anthony Zinni. Israeli security sources also said Israel and the Palestinians would renew security coordination in the coming days.

Controversial U.N. official resigns

The U.N. high commissioner on human rights, considered harshly anti-Israel by many Jewish groups, announced that she will step down.

Despite previous indications that she would continue in her post, Mary Robinson announced Monday that she will step down in six months as planned. Jewish leaders welcomed the news.

"We're quite happy that she's stepping down. She's exhibited quite clear bias against the state of Israel," said Andrew Srulovitch, director of U.N. Watch.

Robinson is "unwilling to assign responsibility" for violence or other problems "to the Palestinians, whereas she is overly eager to assign responsibility to the Israelis," he said. Robinson was especially criticized for her handling of a U.N. anti-racism conference last summer that became a forum for vicious anti-Semitism and attacks on Israel.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Campaign finance reform: Good or bad for the Jews?

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Bill Clinton won the Democratic presidential nomination in 1996, Monte Friedkin was standing at his side at the Democratic convention.

It was a powerful statement about the influence of the Florida businessman, who was former finance chair of the Democratic National Committee and national chairman of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

In 2000, Mel Sembler, a shopping center developer from Florida who was the honorary chairman of the Republican Jewish Coalition, served as the finance chair of the Republican National Committee and was a major supporter of George W. Bush's run for the presidency.

Today he serves as the U.S. ambassador to Italy.

With the U.S. Congress apparently ready to pass a sweeping campaign finance reform bill, it is too soon to know just how such an overhaul will alter the political influence of the Jewish community.

The impact of large Jewish donors and fund raisers — whom both the Democratic and Republican parties have relied upon heavily for tens of millions of dollars — is clearly going to change.

Still, most experts think Jewish interests will fare well because the community is well organized politically and can adapt to change.

The bill moving through the U.S. Senate would prohibit unregulated contributions by groups or individuals to the parties, known as "soft money" donations. It also would limit broadcast ads shortly before elections.

The ban on unlimited donations to national parties is not expected to adversely affect the political influence of the Jewish community, and some even think the new laws will enhance Jewish influence.

The potential effects of the bill are "overblown," according to Morris Amitay, the founder of Washington PAC, a pro-Israel political action committee.

"This is much ado about nothing," he said. "This doesn't change much at all for our community."

Large donors to the parties would have to find new ways to flex their political muscle.

Larger contributions could still be made by donating up to \$10,000 to state and local parties per year, financing issue ad campaigns and direct mail efforts or through other means.

But the prevailing notion is that hard money — money that goes directly to candidates and their campaigns — has been and will continue to be the backbone of Jewish giving.

"The Jewish community's strength is not in the \$100,000 checks, it's in the \$1,000 checks," Friedkin said.

In fact, the bill would double — to \$2,000 — the amount individuals can contribute directly to a candidate. Donors could give up to \$95,000 to candidates and parties in each two-year election cycle.

The bill would impose the biggest overhaul to the nation's campaign finance laws since limits were placed on contributions to candidates in 1974.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed campaign finance reform legislation in 1998 and 1999, but the measures died in the Senate. While its fate in the Senate is still

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan: Israeli acts 'illegitimate'

Kofi Annan accused Israel of launching illegitimate attacks on Palestinian civilians.

In a letter leaked Monday, the U.N. secretary-general said Israel's incursion into Palestinian cities and refugee camps earlier this month resembled "all-out conventional warfare."

Annan also wrote that "Israel is fully entitled to defend itself against terror. But this right does not discharge it of its obligation to respect the fundamental principles and rules of international law."

P.A. official praises terrorists

A Palestinian security official praised the group behind most of the recent terror attacks against Israel.

The Al Aksa Brigades, a militia of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, has carried out most of the deadly suicide bombings and shootings in Israel and the West Bank in recent weeks.

Security chief Jibril Rajoub, generally considered a moderate on the Palestinian spectrum, said Monday that the group represented "the noblest phenomenon in the history of Fatah, because they restored the movement's honor and bolstered the political and security echelons of the Palestinian Authority."

Despite its commitments to crack down on terror, the Palestinian Authority will not take action against the brigades, Rajoub said.

Israeli team scores goal

Israelis are cheering a victory by an Israeli soccer team over a favored Italian squad.

"It's the greatest victory ever for Israeli soccer," said Dror Kashtan, the coach of Hapoel Tel Aviv, which beat AC Milan by a score of 1-0 on March 14.

The victory gave Israelis a respite from the grisly news of violence with the Palestinians.

The match was played in Cyprus after it was moved from Israel because of security concerns.



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uncertain this time around, the bill appears to be gaining momentum.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) said he plans to have the Senate approve the bill before Congress breaks on March 25 for its spring recess.

In fact, Daschle plans to have a vote on the House version of the bill, instead of on a Senate version, for fear that having to work out a compromise on the two could mean ultimate defeat.

While several Jewish groups have expressed support for some form of reform, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism has been beating the drum of campaign finance reform for years.

"Soft money and issue ads breed mistrust, cynicism and apathy — sentiments that are as incompatible with a healthy democracy as they are with religious principles," the center said in a statement.

Some voices in the community note that Jews, because of their small numbers, cannot rely solely on their power as a voting bloc, and therefore whatever influence they can yield through political machines — and giving — is important.

But Ken Goldstein, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, thinks Jews will just step up their giving directly to candidates and campaigns, and therefore the legislative change will not affect their influence on politics.

Jack Stein, a former special adviser to the White House during the Reagan administration and past chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, agreed.

"We will be a player in both parties," said Stein, who himself has been a major contributor to the Republican Party and Republican candidates.

Most of the giving will continue to come from individual donors, rather than Jewish political action committees, political activists say.

Amitay and others discounted the notion that political action committees would suddenly re-emerge as the powerful vehicles they were in the 1980s.

In the 1999-2000 election cycle, pro-Israel PACS donated a total of \$1.9 million to political candidates, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

There will be a limit of \$5,000 in donations to any one PAC, the same limit as before.

No law is perfect and laws have the potential for unintended consequences, but this law should not cause great concern, said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Total public financing or the curtailing of out-of-state money for campaigns would have been bad for the Jewish community, Forman said.

The conventional wisdom is that the more modest changes proposed in this legislation would help Jews secure a good place in a more democratic and pluralistic system.

In fact some believe that the current system in which corporations and unions are allowed to donate unlimited funds to political parties and finance advertising attacks or endorsements of particular candidates is actually detrimental to Jewish interests.

"Soft money had made us less relevant," said Scott Gale, president of SMG, a Washington-based fund-raising management group.

Gale predicts that the new laws will enhance the Jewish community's influence on the political system.

But not everyone close to the issue thinks campaign finance reform is positive.

There is concern that the national parties — the easy address for getting money from large Jewish donors — will not be so easily replaced, and therefore the power of the Jewish community will be diminished.

Giving unlimited funds to a national party also allowed for national Jewish influence, as Jews from New York or other areas with high concentrations of Jews could affect out-of-state races, one leading Republican Jewish activist said.

"The voice of the Jewish community will be somewhat muzzled," said the activist, who asked not to be identified.

Many agree that it will be more work to get the same \$250,000 that in the past passed from one donor to a party, but which under the new system would have to be raised from many individuals and channeled to PACs or individual campaigns.

National political parties will have to work with donors and create a new kind of infrastructure of networking and mobilization, said David Magleby, a campaign finance scholar and dean of social sciences at Brigham Young University. □

JEWISH WORLD

Buenos Aires bombing marked

Argentine Jews and Israeli officials marked the 10th anniversary of the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. A siren sounded and relatives of the victims spoke during Sunday's ceremony commemorating the attack, which is still unsolved.

Twenty-nine people were killed and more than 200 injured in the March 17, 1992 blast.

Berlin cemetery attacked

Right-wing extremists likely were behind an explosion at a Jewish cemetery in Berlin.

Police are investigating whether Saturday's homemade grenade attack that damaged a courtyard was the work of Arab terrorists or right-wing fanatics.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center said police should look at the possibility of contacts between German neo-fascists and Middle Eastern extremists. Michel Friedman, vice president of the Central Council of German Jews, said he is "dismayed, indignant and furious at the cowardly act of violence."

Swiss won't ease kosher ban

Switzerland will not ease a law that bans kosher slaughter of animals. The decision by the Swiss government was made after consulting with Swiss Jewish representatives, a government spokesman told JTA. The government also told Jewish leaders that it would guarantee the continued import of kosher meat. Government sources say fear of a possible anti-Semitic backlash forced the government's hand.

Alfred Donath, a Swiss Jewish leader, called the law discriminatory and said he is disappointed that the Swiss people opposed the change.

Latvian SS members remembered

Approximately 600 people gathered in Riga, Latvia, to mark the anniversary of the formation of a Latvian Nazi SS unit.

In addition, more than 100 members of the Latvian National Soldiers Association commemorated the day by meeting at a military cemetery outside Riga.

Last week, the group canceled its annual procession in Riga, saying international controversy could damage its country's bid to enter the NATO military alliance in November.

Rabbi murder trial to be moved

The re-trial of a U.S. rabbi accused of contracting to kill his wife will be moved in an attempt to hold a fair trial. Judge Linda Baxter said the retrial of Fred Neulander would be moved to another county in New Jersey. The first trial ended in a hung jury.

Neulander is accused of having his wife, Carol, killed in 1994 so he could pursue an affair.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

When Israel most needs unity, government shaky over conversion

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The issue of conversion threatens to undermine Israel's shaky unity government, weakened by the 18-month-old Palestinian intifada and infighting among restless coalition partners.

Last week, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Interior Minister Eli Yishai decided to explore the possibility of a law that would recognize only Orthodox conversions, circumventing a February High Court of Justice ruling that recognized the validity of Reform and Orthodox conversions performed in Israel.

After Yishai threatened to pull his fervently Orthodox Shas Party out of the government, Sharon agreed to establish a committee of coalition faction leaders to examine the issue. "Sharon promised us a law that will address conversion," Yishai said, according to Israel Radio. "As far as we're concerned, this is the conversion law."

Representatives of the Conservative movement, from both Israel and the United States, wrote to Sharon urging him to exercise "extreme caution" in such a step.

"Any law seeking to overturn the Supreme Court decision," the letter warns, "could lead, heaven help us, to a deep schism and an open confrontation between Diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel, and to the erosion of freedom of religion and conscience of Israeli citizens and residents."

The Interior Ministry has been registering non-Orthodox converts as Jewish on their Israeli ID cards since Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein threatened to hold Yishai in contempt of court last week if he didn't enforce the High Court ruling.

On Monday, for example, a group of Reform converts was registered — though the Reform movement objected to Yishai's insistence on appending the date of the registration, a subtle means of indicating that it took place after the court ruling.

Supreme Court President Aharon Barak had given Yishai 10 days to explain why he was not carrying out the court ruling to register more than 20 Israeli residents who had converted to Judaism in Reform or Conservative ceremonies.

On Sunday, however, the State Prosecutor's Office informed Barak that it saw no reason to open contempt of court proceedings against Yishai, since his ministry indeed was registering converts. The Israel Religious Action Center, which represents the Reform movement in Israel, filed a complaint last week charging that Yishai was refusing to comply with the High Court ruling.

"After the Interior Minister continues to say that he does not intend to uphold the High Court ruling, the prime minister has no choice but to fire him," said Nicole Maor, an attorney for the Israel Religious Action Center.

The Knesset tried to avert a crisis by passing new regulations abolishing the "nationality" entry from identity cards. Proposed by several fervently Orthodox Knesset members, the bill passed a Knesset committee by 9-4 vote.

That compromise was acceptable to Yishai. However, the new regulations won't take effect for another 40 days, and they don't bypass the entire High Court ruling.

The change would affect only new ID cards, not the nationality listing in the Interior Ministry's population registry.

"We must think together and come up with practical solutions on issues of religion and state in order to avoid a situation where issues that affect our entire destiny as a people will be decided by the court," Deputy Prime Minister Natan Sharansky, the leader of the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, told JTA. "This will cause a great rift in the nation, during a period in which unity is one of the most important weapons in our arsenal." □

Israeli charter to fly to U.S.

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli charter carrier is to begin flights to New York in July. The managing director of Israir said the carrier would fill a gap left since the collapse of TWA and the end of Delta flights to Israel, according to the Jerusalem Post. The airline plans to fly three night flights per week. □

Russian anti-Semitism assessed as Congress moves to revise policy

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The first indications of a possible trade war between Russia and the United States surfaced earlier this month when Russia followed through on its decision to ban U.S. poultry imports due to health considerations.

As if nostalgic for the Cold War tradition of tying every problem to the Jewish question, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick said in Washington that the ban could lead Congress to drop its plans to adjust the 70s-era Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which linked U.S.-Soviet trade relations to loosening restrictions on Jewish emigration.

Zoellick's threat provoked a wave of jokes, both on the street and in the Russian media, comparing Jewish legs and other parts of the body with the Bush legs, a popular Russian nickname for the cheap U.S.-produced chicken legs that flooded Russia in immense quantities a decade ago under the first President Bush.

But few observers in Russia believe that the Jackson-Vanik Amendment will still apply to Russia after congressional hearings on the issue, which are expected to take place next month.

The only question seems to be: What should the Jews get in return when the restrictions are lifted?

"Jackson-Vanik is not working in the present-day conditions, but it's absolutely unacceptable to just give it away," Lev Krichevsky, director of the U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League's Center on Anti-Semitism and Extremism in Russia, told JTA.

According to the ADL and other Jewish organizations, the United States should demand from Russia a set of guarantees for religious and ethnic minorities, as well as consistency and effectiveness in dealing with hate crimes and official support for the return of the Jewish property seized under the Communists.

Jackson-Vanik has "now become the vehicle to discuss what steps are necessary to facilitate" Russian Jewish life, said Harold Luks, chairman of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia. But the move to lift Jackson-Vanik provisions comes amid disagreement among monitors over the state of Jewish life in Russia.

Many in the Jewish community believe that the economic situation has improved, the political situation is relatively stable and the government has signaled that it is possible to live as a Jew in Russia.

"Jews in Russia feel fine," Karol Ungar, head of the Jewish Agency for Israel's delegation to Russia, recently told reporters.

A chorus of Jewish voices in Russia, including public statements by leading umbrella groups and the major international Jewish organizations working inside the country, say state anti-Semitism is absent, while the total number of anti-Semitic incidents is declining, thanks to the pro-Jewish stance of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Acts of anti-Semitism are declining dramatically; this is due to the policies of the new administration," Rabbi Berel Lazar, one of the two chief rabbis of Russia, said in a letter to President Bush, urging him to graduate Russia out of Jackson-Vanik.

But a group of Russian Jewish leaders sent a letter to Putin last month, urging him to stop what they believe to be an anti-Semitic campaign in the Russian media involving dozens of organizations — and hundreds of periodicals across Russia with a combined

circulation in the millions. Adolph Shayevich, Russia's other chief rabbi and a signatory to the letter, slammed the inactivity of the authorities in fighting this campaign.

"There is a mass of anti-Semitic publications, synagogues and cemeteries are being vandalized across the country — and the state Duma keeps pretending there is no problem. Sometimes a regional governor is making an openly anti-Semitic statement, saying it has been coordinated with the Kremlin administration — and there is no reaction from the Kremlin," Shayevich said.

Lev Gudkov, head of the VTSIOM Institute of Public Opinion, is very careful in assessing the situation.

Research shows that the level of anti-Semitic feelings has remained stable for a number of years, said Gudkov, who is widely considered the most reliable source on the subject.

Gudkov added, however, that there are signs that anti-Semitic sentiments and incidents have risen recently among Russian youngsters, which, he said, is part of a more general rise in xenophobia among Russian teens.

According to Alexander Axelrod, the director of ADL's office in Moscow, there were 24 serious offenses against Jews and Jewish communal property in Russia in 2001, compared with 18 in 2000.

The ADL's Axelrod and Krichevsky, as well as other U.S.-based experts, attribute the growth to a general rise in hate crimes and to better monitoring of the situation.

The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, which traditionally takes a militant stance on the issue, drew attention in its recent statement on the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the rise of anti-Semitism in Russia, and criticized the statements by some Russian Jewish leaders that they say minimize the scope and danger of anti-Semitism in the country.

Leonid Stonov, director of the UCSJ's bureaus in the FSU, told JTA that in many regions the local administration has stayed traditionally anti-Semitic — a remnant of Soviet anti-Semitism.

These old-timers, according to UCSJ's regional monitors, are using every hole in the Russian legal system to hinder anti-hate-crimes legislation.

The regional prosecutors, for instance, are saying they don't have a working definition of anti-Semitism or xenophobia or fascism, said Alexander Brod, the Moscow-based coordinator of the UCSJ's monitoring system.

"The prosecutors and judges say they need in every case an academic linguistic analysis of the use of the word *zhid*," or kike, he said.

The latest developments in the city of Yekaterinburg presented a striking example of this legal blind alley.

Last year Mikhail Oshtrakh, a local Jewish leader, sent written appeals to the authorities demanding that criminal charges be brought against the local diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church for distributing anti-Semitic materials in local churches, including "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." The book purports to describe a Jewish plot to take over the world.

In December, a case against local church officials was opened by local prosecutors, probably under some pressure from the Kremlin. Then the charges were suddenly dropped earlier this month. Prosecutors reportedly determined that there was not enough evidence to press the case.

"They will close the case, of course," Oshtrakh said a few days before his prediction came true. "I only want that the church leaders apologize before the Jewish community."

But so far there has been no apology. □