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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat calls for P.A. elections

Yasser Arafat called on Palestinian legislators to make "speedy preparations" for new elections, but mentioned no date.

In an address Wednesday before the Palestinian legislative council, Arafat also said it is "time for change and reform" in the Palestinian Authority.

Arafat offered a rare acknowledgment that he has made mistakes, but he placed most of the blame for the current crisis on Israel.

Anti-Israel resolution passes

An anti-Israel resolution passed at the annual conference of the U.N.'s World Health Organization.

The Egyptian-sponsored resolution passed by a vote of 48-8 with 69 abstentions at Wednesday's meeting in Geneva.

The resolution, which makes no mention of Palestinian terrorism, condemns the "Israeli war machine" for the "mass killing of men, women and children" in Jenin and other refugee camps, and for other violence that has wounded "over 40,000" Palestinians since September 2000.

UJC leaders meet Bush

President Bush met privately with 40 Jewish national and community leaders. During a 40-minute briefing Wednesday, leaders from the United Jewish Communities thanked the president for his support of Israel. The president remarked that his relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is positive, UJC Chairman James Tisch said. Bush also denounced anti-Semitism in Europe. On the domestic front, UJC expressed support for Bush-backed faith-based legislation and "naturally occurring retirement communities."

Jewish teens attacked near Paris

French police are searching for those responsible for a weekend attack on five Jewish teen-agers in a Paris suburb.

A gang of around 10 people, described by police as being of North African origin, beat the youths Sunday in the suburb of Saint Maur Des Fosses.

"According to witnesses, the attackers shouted racist insults like 'Go back where you came from. You don't belong here,' beat them up, then broke into their car and stole some of their CDs," a local police official said Tuesday.

UJC reduces field operations as part of a major budget cut

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — The North American Jewish federation system just got leaner.

The United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the federations, is cutting 38 percent of its field operations — the folks who service local federations.

The cuts, which will be completed by July 1, meant laying off 16 professional staff, closing regional offices in Chicago and South Florida, and moving UJC's New Jersey office to its Manhattan headquarters.

Its Southeastern and Western offices — relatively newer federation strongholds where UJC devotes significant resources for development — will remain open, according to UJC President and CEO Steven Hoffman.

The cuts are part of an overall budget crop from \$50.3 million to \$42.5 million, which was approved overwhelmingly by the budget committee in April and will be voted on by the member federations on June 10.

Hoffman said the cuts are a response to the demands of its member federations, many of which have complained of a bloated budget.

The cuts in the regional offices represent 35 percent to 40 percent of the cuts in the overall budget.

The two other biggest cuts will apply to reduced subsidies for missions and travel for lay leadership.

The decision is also a reflection of lean economic times, with local federations having trouble meeting their own costs, let alone making dues to the UJC.

The cuts come at a time when crises in Israel and Argentina, along with a rise in global anti-Semitism, have spurred the federation system's largest fund-raising effort since the 1973 Yom Kippur War. For Hoffman, who took office last summer, the cuts represent an opportunity to put into action his vision for UJC.

He said he plans to enhance Israel-Diaspora relations with a more effective UJC Israel operation, groom professional federation and lay leadership, beef up the endowment fund and reform the regional services from what he termed an "antiquated system" to teams of consultants.

"I believe insufficient attention was paid to how the consulting was actually done" in favor of counting the numbers of consultants and how many contact hours they clocked, he said.

While there's concern over the implications of these cuts in particular, faith in the system under Hoffman's charge seems to override it.

The young UJC — a three-year-old merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal — has encountered obstacles in its effort to serve as a central address for American Jewry and its overseas giving.

It has struggled to combine organizations with different cultures and satisfy the local federations, which some say have tried to micromanage it. And it has been accused at times of weak leadership and an unclear vision.

But Hoffman, the popular longtime president of Cleveland's Jewish federation who has gained respect in his ability to run a tight ship, has insiders' withholding judgment.

Richard Wexler, a former UJA president and member of the UJC's budget committee, said he "would have liked to have seen cuts that didn't devastate the professional cadre of UJC" and cut into the "backbone of UJC's work."

At the same time, Wexler said, he wants "to see the UJC emerge with the vision of its CEO, and this budget reflects Steve Hoffman's vision for UJC in every possible

MIDEAST FOCUS

Report: P.A. didn't oppose terror

A U.S. State Department report says "there is no conclusive evidence" that Palestinian leaders had advanced knowledge of terrorist attacks against the Jewish state.

But the semiannual report, which assesses the Palestinian Authority's action from July through December 2001, says Palestinian leaders knew about the involvement of the Al-Aksa Brigades, Tanzim and members of the Force 17 presidential guard in terrorist attacks "and did little to rein them in."

Israel says Arafat still uses terror

Yasser Arafat still considers terrorist attacks a tool for political aims, according to Israeli security officials.

The assessment was contained in a report on the aftermath of Israel's recent anti-terror campaign in the West Bank, Israel Radio reported. The report also concluded that the military campaign had dealt a blow to Palestinian terrorism.

Israeli Arabs knew of attack

Two Israeli Arab sisters suspected of trying to help suicide bombers allegedly had prior knowledge of another attack in Jerusalem.

The charge sheet against the two said they knew in advance about the female bomber who blew herself up in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market last month, killing six people and injuring 75, Israel Radio reported. The two admitted during questioning they had worked with Palestinian terrorists from the West Bank.

Palestinian minister beaten

Masked assailants in Ramallah attacked a Palestinian Authority minister. Five people jumped Hassan Asfour and his bodyguard outside the minister's home Monday night and then fled.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat ordered their capture.



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way." Wexler, schooled in the previous organizational structure, said one of its strengths that hasn't translated in the merger was the "significant engagement" between the local federations and national leadership.

Part of that engagement, he said, came from the consulting services and regional structure that existed.

Hoffman responded that under the new system, such engagement would be found by linking the right resources at the UJC with the federations that are seeking help and information.

The information would be provided in such a way "that will actually help them change," not just "flood them with information and then walk away," he said.

The cuts are a "smart, strategic move," said Jeffrey Klein, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County.

He added that he didn't think the regional closures "will have a negative impact at all."

Still, Klein noted that "regional services are predominantly a benefit to smaller federations and not a large federation like ours."

Indeed, Steven Low, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri and Western Kentucky, has a different take on the cuts.

"I desperately need much more engagement," he said.

With only two full-time staff and one part-time assistant to connect scattered Jews across 45,000 square miles, "everyone in our office has to be a jack-of-all-trades," he said.

"We're stretched thin to get the job done," he said, and could use someone "who can give me an idea, a methodology, maybe to provide materials."

Low has headed his federation for 10 years, and said consultants were once very "proactive."

Before the merger, he had a UJA consultant as well as a CJF one. But in the last year, he said, "frankly, I'm not sure if we have a consultant," or "who that consultant is." Now he calls the central office in New York for help and relies on the mutual support that federations offer each other — for instance, through the new listserv that links them.

The regional staff was in major need of reorganization, said Karen Barth, the consultant behind the consolidation.

Barth, who worked for the consulting firm McKinsey & Co. before starting her own firm, Atid, or future in Hebrew, said her research revealed that the UJC consultants spent more time doing UJC work rather than servicing their client federations. "We're just refocusing," she said.

UJC consultants will employ a "best practices" approach — business jargon for scouting out what works across the federations and implementing a "cross-fertilization of ideas" with teams of consultants specializing in different size federations.

There will be "more consistent, high quality service," she said, and consultants will remain geographically close to their clients.

It was only an "accident of history" that there was ever a South Florida office, she said, noting that that region will now be served by the Atlanta office.

And the middle of the country will be supported by the other offices or perhaps someone who lives in that area who can offer service without the overhead.

"I'd say I'm moderately concerned," said Eric Stillman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, who will be losing his community consultant.

But he takes a "wait-and-see attitude" along with the "big picture view."

Although his federation wasn't one of those pushing for the cuts, he expects to support the budget at the June meeting to do "what is best for the system rather than how it is parochially going to affect my federation."

Stillman, like many federation officials, said he wants to ensure that the maximum amount of dollars is going overseas, and one way to do that is through a smaller national system.

Despite his concerns, Low, too, is willing to give it a chance.

"They say they have a plan, and they have consulted with us," he said of UJC.

He's hopeful, he said, that what UJC is doing "is reorganizing to become more efficient, and in the long run I'm going to have everything that I need." □

JEWISH WORLD

Video of Pearl aired

CBS News aired excerpts of a video in which journalist Daniel Pearl told his captors, "My father's Jewish, my mother's Jewish, I'm Jewish," just before they killed him.

According to the report, aired Tuesday night, the video made it clear that Pearl's captors killed him because he was Jewish and an American, not because they thought he was a spy.

Pearl's family later criticized CBS' "heartless" decision to air the video, which CBS said was available on an Arabic Web site. CBS News anchor Dan Rather said the network decided to air portions of the video after considerable deliberation because it showed "the kind of propaganda terrorists are using in their war against the United States."

The network did not broadcast what it called "graphic" portions of the video, which intercut images of Pearl being decapitated with pictures of the intifada. The entire video was shown in a Pakistani court Tuesday during the trial of four men accused of kidnapping and killing Pearl.

U.S. to act against boycotts

The U.S. Department of Commerce plans to enforce regulations prohibiting Americans from supporting anti-Israel boycotts.

"The U.S. government stands firm in its policy of opposing restrictive trade practices or boycotts against Israel," Kenneth Juster, undersecretary of commerce for industry and security, said Tuesday.

ADL: Hate at anti-Israel rallies

Pro-Palestinian rallies around the United States have turned into forums for anti-Semitic hate, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The escalation in rhetoric at pro-Palestinian rallies "goes far beyond legitimate criticism of Israel and often can be categorized as raw anti-Semitism," the ADL said.

Allen: Boycott is Nazi tool

Filmmaker Woody Allen criticized a call for Hollywood figures to weigh current and past anti-Semitism in France before attending the Cannes Film Festival.

"I think any boycott is wrong," Allen, who was slated to open the festival Wednesday, said in a radio interview. "Boycotts were exactly what the Germans were doing against the Jews."

The Pacific Southwest Region of the American Jewish Congress recently placed ads in Hollywood trade papers drawing parallels between the collaborationist Vichy regime of 1942 and the France of 2002. But the organization maintained it had not specifically called for a boycott.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Prague Jews brace for revelations from police files to open in summer

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) – Prague's top Jewish official is poised to access secret police archives on an anti-Jewish operation run by the former Communist regime.

Tomas Jelinek told JTA he intends to take advantage this summer of a new law allowing the public to scrutinize former StB secret police files. The archives include files on the notorious Operation Spider, under which Czech Jews were spied on, intimidated and in some cases forced to emigrate by officials in the 1950s and then in the 1970s and 1980s.

State officials used a range of tactics, including interrogation and informers, to establish what links Czech and Slovak Jewish communities had with Israel, a state that Moscow regarded at the time as an enemy.

Jelinek said he believed the Jewish community should act quickly to find out what lay behind the state's operation. "Those files are now open to everyone, and who but us should be the first to look at them?" he said.

"We should study the issues that are related to us. It is not so much about the Jewish community now, it is more about how the Jewish community was viewed by the Communist regime — the politics of the Communist government against Israel and support of the Arab countries and so on," he said. "It is more about history than about the present."

The files may contain information not only about the motives behind the operation but also details about Jews who collaborated with the state, either willingly or under duress, in its quest for information about Israel.

Jelinek accepted the sensitivity of this aspect, but insisted that this was not a witch hunt for former collaborators.

"This is not about individuals," he continued. "Most of the people who will be mentioned in the files are probably not alive anymore or are no longer involved in Jewish life," he said.

"There will be cases involving people which must be in some way discussed with the knowledge that this is not a historical source. It is not so different from those people who studied the Nazi archives," he said.

However, Jelinek did suggest that action could be taken in certain circumstances.

"If someone was hurt — for example, if they were fired from their job because of a statement made by an individual — a mechanism should be found for these people to receive some sort of settlement. On the other hand, everyone has the right to give their own point of view."

Jelinek said he hopes to arrange for an independent analysis of the files to ensure a balanced approach.

"The first thing we should be interested in is the Prague Jewish community, and you have to do it in a way that is transparent and which is just," he added.

The possibility that the files may shed new light on one of the most difficult periods of modern Czech Jewish history is creating a stir in Prague Jewish circles.

Among those eagerly waiting to discover what the files contain is David Stecher, chairman of the Jewish community's supervisory board.

In February 1982, Stecher became the only community member of his generation to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah.

The prayer book he received as a present had to be smuggled into the country. But Stecher's parents and grandmother, longtime members of the Jubilee Synagogue minyan in Prague's Jerusalemska Street, were prepared to risk the wrath of the authorities.

"Life later was made quite difficult for me at school because of the Bar Mitzvah, but I had no regrets because I had an opportunity to keep Jewish traditions going in Prague," Stecher said.

Stecher's mother Magdalena, who now lives in Germany with her husband, Denis, said the decision to hold the Bar Mitzvah was prompted by the religious devotion of her mother-in-law, Waltraut Stecher, who died 10 years ago. □

New bill would toughen sanctions on P.A., tighten waiver provisions

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. lawmakers are considering a bill that would impose tough sanctions on the Palestinian leadership — and give President Bush less latitude to maneuver around them.

The Arafat Accountability Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives last week in an attempt to increase the pressure on the Palestinian Authority and its president, Yasser Arafat, to crack down on terrorism.

The bill would restrict Palestinian leaders' movement in the United States, and limit the reasons the U.S. president could use to avoid imposing sanctions.

The bill is being heavily pushed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. It comes as a State Department report released this week concludes that the Palestinian Authority is not taking action against terrorist groups. "This legislation is a statement, and that statement is, 'Enough is enough,'" said Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), who is co-sponsoring the bill with Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), the deputy majority whip.

"By imposing sanctions on the Palestinian Authority, the United States will show that we have had enough excuses for terrorism," Ackerman said.

Like a bill introduced last month in the Senate, the House legislation would deny visas to Palestinian Authority officials and restrict the travel of Palestinian officials at the United Nations.

The bill also would freeze the American assets of Palestinian leaders and downgrade the Washington office of the PLO.

In addition, the White House would be required to assess every 90 days whether the Palestinian Authority was complying with its commitments under various treaties with Israel.

The White House also would have to determine whether the PLO, Palestinian Authority or other Palestinian groups are terrorist organizations.

"It creates a report card for the PLO at a time that they need a report card," Blunt said.

Unlike other bills on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that have made their way through Congress, the Arafat Accountability Act does not allow the U.S. president to waive all the sanctions in the interest of national security.

The waiver could be used only regarding the designation of groups as terrorist organizations and the prohibition of visas.

Other sanctions in the bill would have to be applied if the Palestinians did not meet their commitments.

Presidents often have used national security waivers to avoid making dramatic moves in the Middle East. Waivers invoked regularly prevent the U.S. Embassy in Israel from being moved to Jerusalem and the PLO office in Washington from being closed.

This bill also contains a provision that would allow the president to deem "that the conditions that warrant these sanctions no longer exist." That's a different standard than current rules, which allow the president to waive sanctions even if he determines that the Palestinians are not complying with their commitments.

Opponents of the bill say it sets a much higher bar for using the waiver. Supporters say the tougher provision still gives the president some latitude.

The bill is expected to face resistance from the Bush administration, which has been hesitant to accept congressional initiatives

supporting Israel for fear of harming the U.S. role as an intermediary in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "It has always been our practice to oppose legislation that inhibits our ability to work with both sides," a State Department spokesman said.

The bill is tougher than another initiative Ackerman spearheaded in the House, which had been considered the cornerstone of congressional initiatives against the Palestinian Authority.

The Middle East Peace Commitments Act, which Ackerman introduced last year, would require the president to assess Palestinian compliance before initiating sanctions.

The Arafat Accountability Act, however, already assumes that Arafat and the Palestinian Authority are noncompliant.

"It's time to go to the next step," he said. "We are no longer studying to determine whether the Palestinians are compliant."

Ackerman said he had been reluctant to support the Arafat Accountability Act because Secretary of State Colin Powell said it tied the hands of the Bush administration, but said he eventually felt that Congress needed to take a tougher stand.

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), sponsor of the Senate bill, said he does not expect to bring the bill to the Senate floor anytime soon, but prefers to have it "sitting there, ready to go" if violence warrants further action.

Blunt said he expects quicker action on the House side.

Currently, the State Department assesses Palestinian compliance with its commitments every six months, in accordance with the PLO Commitments Compliance Act.

The latest report, released this week, said "there is no conclusive evidence" that Palestinian leaders had advance knowledge of terror attacks against Israel, but also said that the Palestinian Authority did not take action against terrorist groups.

"The weight of evidence would indicate that they knew of Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Tanzim and elements of Force 17 involvement in the violence and did little to rein them in," says the report, which assesses Palestinian actions through Dec. 15 of last year.

Members of Arafat's security forces "were deeply involved in the violence," the report found.

The State Department also found that high-level Palestinian officials were involved in planning the smuggling of weapons into the West Bank and Gaza, and that Palestinian media reports had the effect of inciting violence.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, praised the report, as far as it goes. Yet new evidence retrieved since the Dec. 15 cutoff, which documents the Palestinian leadership's involvement in terrorism, will produce a much stronger report in the future, he predicted.

"There is no deniability about" the Palestinian leadership's "complicity in terrorism," Hoenlein said. □

University petitions battle online

NEW YORK (JTA) — Students and faculty at Harvard and MIT are being asked to sign an online petition backing Israel.

The petition was created to counter an earlier one that called on the two universities to divest themselves of their interests in Israel.

It accuses the anti-Israel petition of having a "distorted position that ignores the history of the last few years and revives rhetoric long discredited by its use among extremists as code for the destruction of the Jewish state." □