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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bomber families can't be expelled

Israel cannot exile Palestinian suicide bombers' families to other countries, Israel's attorney general said. Such a move could result in war crimes charges against Israel, Elyakim Rubinstein said. But he did not rule out moving the families from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, as proposed last week in the Cabinet.

Bush may cut off Palestinian aid

President Bush threatened to cut off U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority. "I can assure you, we won't be putting money into a society" that is "corrupt," Bush said Wednesday. The threat came as Bush met with other members of the so-called G-8 nations in the Canadian Rockies.

Like Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed frustration with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. "We've got to have leadership we can negotiate with that is serious about peace," he said. But, he added, "It's for the Palestinians to elect the people that they choose to elect."

Peres pushes for D.C. appointee

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Thursday that the next ambassador to the United States should be considered a political appointee.

Peres took the step after the Foreign Ministry's Labor Board refused to approve the appointment of Danny Ayalon, currently the foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Peres' announcement that Ayalon be considered part of the allowed quota of political appointees was aimed at circumventing the board's action.

P.A. paper slurs U.S. official

The Palestinian Authority's semi-official newspaper issued racial slurs against National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

An article appearing this week in Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda referred to Rice as "colored" and the "dark-complexioned lady," and said Rice's anti-Palestinian policies have "dealt a blow to the image of the African American in the eyes of the vast majority of the world's inhabitants."

The article added: "What compounds the astonishment is that the Black Lady always makes a point, whether the opportunity presents itself or not, of denouncing the Palestinians."

Supreme Court ruling on vouchers elicits expected mixed Jewish reaction

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Supreme Court's long-awaited ruling on school vouchers may not be the last word.

In a narrow 5-4 decision issued Thursday, the high court said that vouchers, which provide government funds for students to attend parochial or private schools, do not violate the constitutional separation of church and state. The battleground now is likely to move to the state level, where many Jewish groups plan to mount an offensive against vouchers, arguing that they are bad public policy even if constitutional.

It does not appear that the decision, which came on the last official day for the high court, will have substantial implications for other church-state issues.

The majority opinion made a clear distinction between vouchers and direct government funding of religious schools. The decision thus is not likely to have an impact on the issue of charitable choice, which allows federal money to go directly to religious groups that provide social services.

The fight could be taken up at the congressional level, but with the federal government straining to finance the war on terrorism, it will be hard for lawmakers to make the case for more government funding for schools.

The court decision came a day after a U.S. appeals court decided that the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are unconstitutional.

Americans across the political and religious spectrum expressed outrage. Jewish analysts worried that the Pledge case could end up trivializing all church-state issues.

In contrast, the vouchers case was followed very closely in the Jewish community. The American Jewish Congress was involved in preparing the plaintiff's brief against the vouchers, and the American Jewish Committee and ADL also joined a brief on the voucher opponents' side.

Reaction to the ruling in the Jewish community was predictably mixed, with longtime opponents such as the Anti-Defamation League calling the decision "a step backwards for religious liberty."

Opponents cite vouchers as a breach of church-state separation and say they drain money from the public school system. In contrast, Orthodox groups, which think vouchers could help fund Jewish day school education, praised the ruling.

The case before the Supreme Court — *Zalman, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Ohio, et al. v. Simmons-Harris, et al.* — addressed whether the state-funded Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program subsidized religion. The program, targeted but not limited to low-income families, was started in 1995 to rescue the city's failing schools.

Opponents of the program said such a subsidy would violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which prohibits the government from supporting a religion. But the Supreme Court emphasized the choice contained in a voucher program.

"This Court's jurisprudence makes clear that a government aid program is not readily subject to challenge under the Establishment Clause if it is neutral with respect to religion and provides assistance directly to a broad class of citizens who, in turn, direct government aid to religious schools wholly as a result of their own genuine and independent private choice," Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote for the majority.

Justices Antonin Scalia, Sandra Day O'Connor, Clarence Thomas and Anthony Kennedy joined with Rehnquist's decision. Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, John Paul Stevens and David Souter dissented.

Breyer wrote that publicly financed voucher programs pose a risk in terms of

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian killed in clash

Clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen took place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In a refugee camp near Nablus, a 17-year-old Palestinian was shot and killed Thursday when he fired a pistol at an Israeli tank.

In Hebron, Israeli soldiers continued a siege of the Palestinian Authority compound for a third day. Some 40 people, including at least 15 suspected terrorists, remained holed up in the compound. About 150 Palestinians surrendered to Israeli troops the previous day.

Despite the Hebron standoff, Israel's latest military operation has run into far less resistance than the army encountered during Operation Protective Wall in April and May.

Israeli Arab drove suicide bomber

An Israeli Arab who drove a suicide bomber to an attack was convicted of being an accomplice to murder. Ahmed Jaber, a Hadera resident married to a Jewish woman, was convicted of driving a suicide bomber from Tulkarm to Netanya. Five people were killed and more than 80 were wounded in the attack a year ago.

Jaber was paid some \$25 to transport the bomber. Other drivers had refused to take the terrorist because of his suspicious appearance, Israel Radio reported. Sentencing will take place at a later date.

Flying casino grounded

Israel's transportation minister reversed a decision to allow a flying casino to operate out of Ben-Gurion Airport. Ephraim Sneh changed his mind after Israel's attorney general urged him to rethink the decision. Last month, Sneh said he would permit a specially outfitted 747 to take off from and land at Ben-Gurion Airport, after he decided that the Israeli and foreign developers of the project had met the necessary criteria.



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religiously-based social conflict, and that parental choice does not alleviate the constitutional problem of vouchers.

Jewish groups were not surprised by Thursday's decision. Still, the high court's final say is anything but for voucher opponents. The ADL said that it would continue to fight vouchers at the state level on policy and constitutional grounds.

The American Jewish Committee said the decision was "a troubling endorsement of unsound public policy" and said it, too, would fight vouchers under state constitutional laws that often contain more stringent safeguards.

Jeffrey Sinensky, legal counsel and director of domestic policy for AJCommittee, said they would mount a "proactive, aggressive" campaign both to convince those states with stronger church-state separation safeguards to beat back vouchers, and to encourage other states not to be forced into accepting voucher programs.

Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, sounded a warning of government support for potentially anti-Semitic teachings.

"Schools run by the Nation of Islam that teach anti-Semitic lies could now receive taxpayer money" through the vouchers that families use.

Rosenthal said debate in the Jewish community will continue about the issue of vouchers, but she urged states to resist the temptation to adopt voucher programs.

Orthodox groups, however, believe government support to religious schools is not only acceptable but necessary for the Jewish community. Vouchers are not a panacea, but they will provide help to parents, said Abba Cohen, director and counsel of the Washington office of Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox group.

Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, countered that the Jewish community should not build up its day school system at the expense of the public school system.

Opponents of vouchers also question whether most voucher programs would benefit Jewish students, since most of the programs target low-income families.

Critics also say accepting government aid in any form opens the door to government entanglement.

The potential for government entanglement is of serious concern to the Orthodox community, Cohen said, but schools should have the option to accept vouchers and decide for themselves whether it would compromise their religious beliefs.

The Orthodox Union, which joined a friend-of-the-court brief supporting the voucher program, hailed the decision and said it was an example of government neutrality rather than hostility toward religion.

The high court had studiously avoided a definitive ruling on school vouchers for years. As with many close church-state cases, the outcome of this case heavily depended on Justice O'Connor's swing vote.

In her concurrence with Chief Justice Rehnquist's opinion, O'Connor wrote: "I do not believe that today's decision, when considered in light of other longstanding government programs that impact religious organizations and our prior Establishment Clause jurisprudence, marks a dramatic break from the past."

But there already has been a sharp change in the court's take on church-state cases, according to Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department.

Justices look at these church-state cases as issues of individual choice and government even-handedness toward religion, rather than a strict "no government aid to religious schools" policy, he said.

The ground has shifted and the Jewish community's bedrock assumption that the Establishment Clause guards against any government support for religious schools "doesn't work anymore," Stern said.

"If you want to be effective, you have to rethink how you talk and how you think about this issue," he said.

Now, it appears that the Pledge of Allegiance case, which leapt to the forefront of public debate this week, could also find its way to the Supreme Court.

The federal court ruled Wednesday that the phrase "under God," which the U.S. Congress added to the pledge of Allegiance in 1954, amounted to an endorsement of religion.

In this case, Jewish groups were in rare agreement in criticizing the court's decision, but for different reasons. □

JEWISH WORLD

Poll: European anti-Semitism high

Thirty percent of Europeans cling to traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes, according to a poll by the Anti-Defamation League. The poll of 2,500 Europeans in five countries also found that 62 percent of respondents believe the recent violence against Jews in Europe is a result of anti-Israel sentiment.

"These findings are especially disturbing because they show that the old, classical form of anti-Semitism has been joined by a new form fueled by anti-Israel sentiment," said Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director.

New York man deported

The United States deported a New York man who had served as a guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Michael Gruber was deported to Austria after the U.S. Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit proved that he had participated in Nazi-sponsored acts of persecution.

In ordering the deportation, the judge wrote that Gruber and other "accomplices in these acts of evil" should be "consigned until the end of human history as the ultimate in the personification of total evil." Gruber, who was born in Croatia and has Austrian citizenship, was flown to Austria at his own expense.

Belgian Jews get restitution

Belgian officials agreed to pay about \$55 million to the nation's Jewish community for property stolen or abandoned during the Nazi occupation. "It's a good day for our country," Philippe Markiewicz of the Coordination Committee of Jewish Organizations in Belgium told The Associated Press.

Under agreements signed Thursday, the government will pay \$44.7 million, the country's insurance companies \$9.8 million and the national bank some \$295,000. Negotiations between Jewish organizations and Belgium's private banks to reach a separate agreement are continuing.

Anti-extremism bill passes

Russia's Parliament passed a bill Thursday aimed at combating extremism.

If the bill is signed into law, it will outlaw the use of Nazi symbols, the promotion of any kind of ethnic or religious hatred and the bankrolling of such activity.

Italy's Jewish leader re-elected

Amos Luzzatto was re-elected to a second four-year term as Italy's chief Jewish lay leader.

Luzzatto, 73, was re-elected president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities at the Union's national congress, which ended Wednesday. A resident of Venice, Luzzatto is a retired physician and a recognized Jewish scholar.

Syrian textbooks reject peace and promote hatred of Israel — report

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States hopes Syria will play a role in ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but Syrian children are getting a different kind of message in their schools.

"There is neither excuse nor forgiveness for the one who refrains from Jihad for the cause of God, for the purification of Palestine of the Jews," reads an excerpt from one of Syria's Islamic education textbooks for sixth graders.

Much has been made of Palestinian textbooks and how the "culture of hatred," in the words of Jewish organizations, that is being instilled in Palestinian children destroys chances for peace in future generations.

That culture is alive and well in Syria, B'nai B'rith International says, and people should recognize the importance of what public schools there are teaching.

"They are raising one generation after another of haters," Daniel Mariaschin, executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International, said as he unveiled a new report on Syrian textbooks on Tuesday. "No matter what happens on the political and diplomatic levels, this will certainly never allow us to get to the point we'd like to reach, which is peace for Israel and its neighbors," Mariaschin said.

The report, entitled "Jihad, Jews and Anti-Semitism in Syrian School Texts," details how schoolchildren are taught to hate Zionism and Jews, view terrorist attacks as martyrdom, reject peace with Israel and even seek to destroy the Jewish state.

President Bush did not address the issue in his Mideast policy speech Monday, but Mariaschin believes Bush sent the right message about terror being based on hatred.

Syrian President Bashar Assad so far has ignored warnings from Israel and the United States to stop aiding terrorists. The U.S. State Department still lists Syria as an active state sponsor of terrorism.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) said that Syrian children are being brainwashed and indoctrinated with virulent anti-Semitism and rejection of peace and Israel's right to exist.

Engel sponsored the "Syria Accountability Act" which would give the president tools to impose penalties on Syria if it does not change its ways.

The bill, which has not been passed by the House of Representatives, also calls on Syria to stop harboring and supporting terrorist groups, developing weapons of mass destruction, accepting illegal shipments of Iraqi oil and occupying Lebanon.

B'nai B'rith is sending a copy of its report to every member of Congress. The report, with research conducted by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, examined 68 textbooks used as part of Syria's national school curriculum.

Students in sixth and seventh grade are encouraged to become martyrs: "Let us make seeking martyrdom the highest value in society," the books urge.

In a textbook for fourth-graders the message is even more explicit. "Al-Aksa Mosque and the land of Palestine that surrounds it are a holy country that the Muslims should wage a Jihad, in order to recover it from the hands of the Jews," the book reads, according to a translation included in the study.

An eighth-grade text calls for the liquidation of the "Zionist imperialist-colonialist presence on Arab land." A tenth-grade text says Zionism aims for the liquidation of Arabs and "the settlement of the Jews of the world in Arab Palestine."

The books also contain maps that show "Palestine" instead of Israel and illustrations of Israeli soldiers killing Arabs.

One poem in a fifth grade reader, entitled "Our Country," refers to places in Israel: "From Rafah to Safed, a map of my country, I have drawn upon my liver and left it to my child, our glories are rejoicing, our country, our country."

B'nai B'rith's previous report on Palestinian textbooks, along with meetings with European and U.N. officials, helped focus attention on what Palestinian children were being taught. The European Union "got the message" that funding should not go toward Palestinian textbooks that promote hatred, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is examining Palestinian and Israeli textbooks, Mariaschin said. □

Despite risks, Reform students prepare for study year in Israel

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Mark Miller walks in downtown Jerusalem these days, he leans away from the street whenever he sees an oncoming bus.

While he rues the “insidious” way terror “gets under your skin” in Israel, Miller says trying to shield himself from potential bus bombings is just one way life in Israel is transforming his views of Zionism and Judaism.

“I feel so much right now that Israel is vitally important to our lives as Jews and to the Jewish community,” says Miller, a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

“Things are more starkly illuminated with terror as a backdrop.”

Miller, 33, of Los Angeles, is among 61 first-year cantorial and rabbinical students who are spending their first year at HUC's Jerusalem campus, despite the daily risks they face from what Israelis call the “matzav” — the “situation.”

Only seven students in the entering class stayed behind, with the school's blessing, largely for family reasons.

The rest elected to make the trip — after some soul-searching and after a speech by HUC's president, Rabbi David Ellenson, who says the school's mission to train future Jewish leaders is inextricably linked to its deep-rooted Zionism.

For more than 30 years, HUC has believed that Israel “serves a seminal role” in the development of future Jewish community leaders, Ellenson says.

And the school cannot soften that commitment despite the threat that terrorism poses to students studying in Israel.

“From HUC's perspective, our commitment to Israel cannot brook any compromise,” Ellenson says.

That contrasts sharply with the movement's beginning nearly a century ago, when anti-Zionism was Reform's ruling ideology.

Now, the HUC Board of Governors will hold its 2003 meeting in Jerusalem in solidarity with Israel, and Ellenson will be going to Israel shortly to teach at Hebrew University and the Shalom Hartman Institute.

HUC respected each student's decision whether to live and study in Israel this year, Ellenson says, but he adds that “there cannot be any retreat” from the school's core values.

HUC “embodies certain principles,” Ellenson says. “Foremost is, solidarity with the notion of Jewish peoplehood can only be experienced in the fullest dimension in Israel.”

Rabbinical seminaries for the other movements either require or suggest that students spend time in Israel during their studies, but only the Reform seminary mandates that students spend their first year in Israel.

Several of America's rabbinical seminaries have considered postponing their Israel programs, though none has decided to do so.

HUC's decision to stick with its first-year rule means that nearly all of the freshman class of 2002-2003 will be in Jerusalem, where more suicide bombers have struck during the current intifada than anywhere else in Israel.

But the security situation has deterred few students. The 2002-2003 class is HUC's largest incoming class in 20 years — and even

those who opt to remain behind now must spend a year in Israel before graduating.

The HUC group has been trained to take certain precautions, such as avoiding cafes and public buses, carrying cell phones and maintaining contact through “phone trees.”

Miller, who was last in Israel in January, came back to Jerusalem with his wife a week ago to find an apartment before the school year begins Aug. 14.

Already he has noticed that the landscape has changed radically, on the street and in his heart.

What first struck him is that “life goes on here,” Miller says. “Being in the U.S. or elsewhere, all you see in headlines or on CNN is a tremendous pall. But people are going about with their lives, and hope springs eternal.”

Of course, life has changed. Downtown Jerusalem's thoroughfares — King David and King George streets, Jaffa Street, the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall — used to bustle with activity, but now have only a smattering of people.

Miller finds himself scanning faces, warily taking note of young men who are alone and wearing backpacks.

More soldiers patrol the streets. As one shopkeeper pointed out to Miller, there are no children around.

At nearly empty restaurants, Miller and his wife have been seated by the owners, who also served them and cooked their dinners.

Israelis, who at one time barely noted the arrival of American Jews, feel differently today, he says.

“I've never had so many people thank me for being here. Shopkeepers, taxi drivers, people on the street thank me, say ‘b'hatzlacha’ ” — Hebrew for “good luck” — “and ‘Thank God you're here.’ ”

Israel “is a very large part of my personal commitment to becoming a rabbi,” Miller says. “It feels so good to be here.”

Other rabbinical students who will be in Israel shortly say that the experience is sure to nurture their spiritual and ideological growth.

Debra Goldstein, 52, of Larchmont, N.Y., has been to Israel many times. Each time, this former advertising attorney has found that Israel played a formidable role in her life.

She first went in 1968, “amid Vietnam War angst,” and found her Israeli peers “full of jingoism from the Six-Day War,” often challenging her to live in Israel, she says.

She and her family visited again in 1996, and “all those old Zionist feelings came tumbling back.”

Now, “I don't really have a lot of hesitation. I realize it won't be as freewheeling as in the past,” she says.

Yet “I think we will have an incredible bonding experience from this,” she adds. “Israel, both as a country and as a people, plays a central role in our religion.”

Daniel Septimus, 24, of Cincinnati, says he's not especially worried about going. In fact, he never really doubted he would go, despite the “matzav.”

“In the past year I came to feel that Jews everywhere need to realize that there has to be a Jewish state,” he says. “I'm not so sure I felt that way before.”

Ellenson insists Israel plays a crucial role in every Reform leader's education today.

“We do not minimize the risks,” he says. “But we also tell them something else remarkable is taking place in Israeli life,” and “the path to leadership has to go through Israel.” □