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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Lautenberg tapped for race

Former Sen. Frank Lautenberg was named to replace Sen. Robert Torricelli as the Democratic candidate for a Senate seat from New Jersey.

Lautenberg was not only one of the first Jews elected to the U.S. Senate, he was the first Jew ever elected statewide in New Jersey. A staunch supporter of Israel, Lautenberg has actively embraced Judaism and Jewish causes.

In 1974, at the age of 50, he became general chair of the United Jewish Appeal, the youngest person ever to hold the title. Democratic leaders took one day to name the 78-year-old, three-term senator as their preference to replace Torricelli, who dropped out of the race Monday amid questions about his ethics.

Republican leaders plan to argue in court that it is too late to change any names on the New Jersey ballot. [Page 3]

Israeli soldiers' families speak

The families of three kidnapped Israeli soldiers asked the U.S. Congress for help. "We implore you not to allow terrorist organizations to overcome the forces of law and order in the world," Zipora and Yakov Avitan, the parents of one kidnapped soldier, told lawmakers Wednesday.

Relatives called on the United States to take tougher action against terrorist groups and chastised the ineffectiveness of humanitarian groups, such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International.

Hezbollah kidnaped Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad in an October 2000 raid along the Israeli border. Israel believes the three are dead.

Tony Blair presses Israel, P.A.

U.N. resolutions have to be respected, whether they apply to Iraq or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said.

Addressing a conference of his Labor Party on Tuesday, Blair expressed support for the creation of a Palestinian state "based on the boundaries of 1967."

On Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said Palestinian statehood is inevitable, but that only negotiations will lead to such a state.

"No amount of international pressure will bring about the formation of a Palestinian state," Ben-Eliezer said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Why should Iraq comply with U.N., and not Israel? Arab diplomats ask

By Michael J. Jordan

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — On the surface, it might seem like a fair question: Why does the world insist that Iraq comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions, while Israel ignores reams of them?

As pressure mounts on Baghdad, Arab diplomats are accusing the United Nations — and the United States, especially — of "double standards" when it comes to enforcing U.N. dictates. But how valid is the comparison?

In terms both of substance and accordance with international law, it's a false parallel, pro-Israel advocates say. Essentially, they say, the argument is a smokescreen designed to take the heat off Iraq.

"If we compare the situation generally, there's the political argument that these are two very different types of states: Israel is a liberal democracy, Iraq is a totalitarian state; Iraq has used weapons of mass destruction, Israel has not," said Andrew Srulevitch, executive director of the Geneva-based U.N. Watch.

That's not just an academic difference, supporters of Israel say: Israel is committed to trading land for a durable peace with its neighbors, while Iraq is an aggressive dictatorship that has tried to conquer its neighbors and has used weapons of mass destruction against them. Therefore, they say, Iraqi compliance is more urgent.

In addition, Srulevitch noted, "While the Arab world poses this seemingly simple and convincing question, we have a simple and convincing answer in response: There's a fundamental legal difference between resolutions against Iraq after the Gulf War and those against Israel."

After Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and then the Persian Gulf War, Baghdad surrendered in accordance with the terms of Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter: "Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression."

U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 — the cornerstone of all subsequent Iraq-related resolutions — branded Iraq the aggressor in the conflict and legitimated the sanctions that continue today. It also mandated that U.N. weapons inspectors fully disarm Iraq, a mandate that Iraq blocked.

As for Israel, the 1967 Six-Day War largely was seen in the international community as a "defensive war." Neighbors Egypt, Syria and Jordan had massed troops on the border and were prepared to attack. After the brief conflict, Security Council Resolution 242 laid the groundwork for later negotiations and, crucially, was passed under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter: "Pacific Settlement of Disputes."

Resolution 242 called for an Israeli withdrawal from "territories" it had captured but, after intense negotiations, intentionally omitted the definite article. That was taken to mean that Israel did not have to withdraw from all the territory seized in that war, but that final borders would be negotiated.

The resolution also acknowledged the right of all parties "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

Since then, Israel has become far and away the most popular target of Security Council resolutions. This is due primarily to the bloc of Arab and Muslim states and the alliances they enjoy because of energy needs, regional trade and Third World solidarity.

Dozens more anti-Israel resolutions have emanated from the 190-member U.N. General Assembly, whose declarations, unlike Security Council resolutions, are merely symbolic and do not carry the weight of international law.

To neutral observers, the defense of Israel and its noncompliance with resolutions

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat blasts Jerusalem law

Yasser Arafat lashed out at a bill President Bush signed into law that encourages U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

"This decision is a catastrophe that Muslims and Christians should not let pass in silence," Arafat said Wednesday. "I am asking the American administration and the American president to stop this."

Among other things, the law urges the Bush administration to shift the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. When he signed the bill into law Monday, Bush said he would treat the clauses regarding Jerusalem as a recommendation rather than an order.

Bomb defused at gas station

Israeli police defused a bomb they believe Palestinian terrorists had placed at a gas station near the northern city of Afula.

Bomb experts arrived at the scene early Wednesday after two soldiers noticed a suspicious object and alerted police, Israel Radio reported.

Israel: P.A. smuggled Iraqi oil

The Palestinian Authority helped Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein sell oil illegally, Israeli officials say.

Citing documents they found in Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters, the officials told the CBS news magazine "60 Minutes" on Sunday that the Palestinian Authority helped smuggle Iraqi oil and received millions of dollars in kickbacks for their efforts.

Israeli-Palestinian talks in Qatar

An adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reportedly met with Yasser Arafat's No. 2 man in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar.

Ephraim Halevy, who is the head of Israel's National Security Council, met recently with Mahmoud Abbas in an effort to revive peace talks. Abbas denied the reports in the Israeli media.

smacks of hair-splitting: Noncompliance is noncompliance. But Israel advocates justify the Jewish state's resistance because the resolutions are one-sided and politically motivated.

For example, there are instances where Israel alone is called to task. In April, the Security Council passed a resolution calling for a U.N. investigation of Israel's assault on Jenin, while ignoring Palestinian actions that prompted the operation.

Israel refused to cooperate with the investigation — and, in the end, was vindicated when the United Nations itself said that no massacre had taken place in Jenin.

Iraq runs a close second to Israel as the target of Security Council resolutions. But Arab leaders have complained over the years that more pressure is applied to Iraq to meet its obligations than to Israel, because of Israel's backing from the United States.

Another Security Council resolution was added to the Israel file last week. Borrowing from President Bush's Sept. 12 exhortation that the United Nations must "enforce its own resolutions" vis-a-vis Iraq, pro-Palestinian advocates demanded on Sept. 23 that Israel be given the same treatment.

The panel assailed Israel for its siege of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's headquarters and ordered its withdrawal from Ramallah. The vote was 14-0, as the United States abstained. Arab diplomats then vented their frustration.

"Why these double standards?" Yanya Mahmassani, permanent U.N. observer for the League of Arab States, was quoted in The New York Times. "Why aren't United Nations Security Council resolutions on Israel enforced the way they are on other countries? Israel violated 28 resolutions of the Security Council. Why should not the Security Council shoulder its responsibilities?"

In fact, Israel did comply with the resolution on Sunday, ending its siege of Arafat's office. At the same time, it appeared highly unlikely that pressure would be exerted on the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its obligations under the resolution to bring terrorists to justice.

While Arab diplomats did not address that apparent double standard, they followed a pattern of pressing Israel to honor resolutions while ignoring the obligations those same resolutions imposed on the Arab side.

Thus, for example, Arab nations for years demanded that Israel withdraw from its southern Lebanon security zone under Security Council Resolution 425.

Since Israel's withdrawal in May 2000, however, no pressure has been exerted on the Lebanese government to honor its obligation to assert its authority in the south, where the Hezbollah terror group has continued attacking Israel across the border and has stockpiled missiles that threaten Israeli cities.

In addition, Syria — listed by Washington as a state sponsor of terrorism, but with a two-year post on the Security Council — breaches U.N. sanctions on Iraq by importing some \$1 billion of Iraqi oil a year, according to Dore Gold, Israel's ambassador to the U.N. from 1997-99 and now a top adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

In most resolutions dealing with Israel, Gold noted, the Americans press for language that also makes demands of the Palestinian side.

Infuriated by Israel's siege, Syrian Ambassador Mikhail Wehbe reportedly pressed the council last Friday to drag Israeli Ambassador Yehuda Lancry before the panel to be upbraided. A U.S. diplomat reportedly countered that Palestinian U.N. Observer Nasser al-Kidwa should likewise be summoned to answer for the Palestinians' failure to bring terrorists to justice.

Pointing the finger at Israel often is an attempt by the Arab world to change the subject when a debate becomes uncomfortable, Gold said. But when it comes to the Iraq-Israel comparisons, Israel's supporters may face a challenge in educating the public.

Media such as the New York Times, BBC, Le Monde and El Pais publish quotes from Arab diplomats uncritically, uncontested and without context, Srulevitch said.

"The journalists have one of two problems: They should know" the context behind U.N. resolutions and "are not reporting it, or they don't know the subject and just buy into this argument that there's this comparison," Srulevitch said.

"It's a convincing argument to those who don't know better — the wider public," he said. "That's why it's important to get out the message that this is a comparison between apples and oranges, not apples and apples." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Abusing rabbi to be sentenced

A rabbi convicted of sexually abusing two female students while he was a high school principal is due to be sentenced Friday.

Baruch Lanner, 52, faces between 10 and 20 years in prison and a \$300,000 fine.

A New Jersey jury convicted Lanner in June of two counts of endangering the welfare of two girls between 1992 and 1996, when Lanner was principal of the Hillel High School in Ocean Township, N.J.

In December 2000, a National Council of Synagogue Youth commission blamed Orthodox Union leaders for ignoring reports of Lanner's abuse.

His attorney said Lanner may appeal the conviction after the sentencing.

Church politicking bill dies

A bill permitting houses of worship to endorse political candidates and contribute to their campaigns was defeated Wednesday in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lawmakers voted 239-178 against the bill, which would have amended the tax code to permit a church to participate in a political campaign and maintain its tax-exempt status as long as the involvement was not a "substantial part" of its activities. Jewish groups opposed the bill.

Current tax provisions prohibit all nonprofit groups from participating in political campaigns.

Ukraine says it will return shuls

Ukraine's president vowed to return 58 synagogues to the country's Jewish community.

Leonid Kuchma made the commitment Tuesday at a meeting in Kiev with Ukrainian Jewish leaders and representatives of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Eurasia.

Forty-eight of the synagogues, which were confiscated by the Soviet regime, will be returned immediately, and the other 10 will be returned at a later date, according to Ukraine's chief rabbi, Ya'akov Dov Bleich.

The meeting took place amid increasing international pressure on Kuchma, whom the U.S. State Department suspects of having approved a sale of a radar system to Iraq in violation of U.N. sanctions.

Walter Annenberg dies at 94

Philanthropist Walter Annenberg died Tuesday at 94.

Billionaire publisher, ambassador and close to a succession of U.S. presidents, Annenberg gave to Jewish causes, including to Israel and the Philadelphia Jewish community.

In 1990, Annenberg gave a \$15 million gift to Operation Exodus to bring Russian Jews to Israel.

Lautenberg picked in New Jersey; familiar and beloved face for Jews

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Senate's minyan could soon welcome back a familiar face.

Former Sen. Frank Lautenberg was named Tuesday to replace Sen. Robert Torricelli as the Democratic candidate in New Jersey.

If he survives legal challenges to his candidacy, Lautenberg will face Republican Douglas Forrester in the Nov. 5 election.

But the road to the ballot box for Lautenberg, 78, who served three terms in the Senate from 1982 to 2000, will not be smooth.

Torricelli, who dropped out of the race Monday amid ethics questions, withdrew two weeks after New Jersey's Sept. 16 deadline for altering ballots.

The state's Supreme Court agreed to hear oral arguments Wednesday on whether to allow someone to replace Torricelli on the ballot. Experts said any decision likely would be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

If the court decides to hear an appeal, it would have to decide the case quickly, since the election is Nov. 5.

The situation is different from the 2000 presidential election drama, when the U.S. Supreme Court had to decide whether to order a recount in Florida, according to Kenneth Gross, an election law expert. In this case, the high court would need to find a reason justifying a review of the state law.

One scenario being floated is for Torricelli to resign and New Jersey Gov. Jim McGreevey to appoint Lautenberg in his place and postpone the election. In such a case, there would be more of a need for the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene, Gross said.

If Lautenberg's name does make it on the ballot, Jews in the Garden State, who voted for Torricelli over his Jewish opponent, Dick Zimmer, in 1996, are expected to support Lautenberg as they did in the past, say Democratic Jewish observers.

"Frank is a known quantity for all of New Jersey, but for Jews especially," said Ben Dworkin, the Democratic party chairman in Teaneck, N.J., and a national council member of the National Jewish Democratic Council. "He's not just a friend of Israel; he's an outspoken leader."

Dworkin believes Jews will give their "overwhelming" support to Lautenberg because of his positions on Israel and on domestic issues such as the environment, gun control and abortion rights.

No one is willing to predict specific positions Lautenberg might take as a possible war against Iraq approaches. Before the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Lautenberg voted against authorizing military force against Iraq.

Lautenberg not only was one of the first Jews elected to the U.S. Senate, he was the first Jew ever elected to statewide office in New Jersey. A staunch supporter of Israel, Lautenberg has actively embraced Judaism and Jewish causes.

In 1974, at age 50, he became general chair of the United Jewish Appeal, the youngest person to hold the title.

Lautenberg "has a long history of standing in the right place to support the strongest U.S.-Israel relationship," said Lonny Kaplan, a former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee who is involved in New Jersey politics.

During his Senate terms, Lautenberg spoke forcefully against Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's policies and against anti-Israel incitement in the Palestinian Authority and Arabic-language media. He also co-sponsored legislation allowing American victims of terror to collect damages from the frozen assets of countries that sponsor terrorism.

Also of importance to the Jewish community was Lautenberg's work to assist immigrants, resulting in a 1990 bill requiring immigration officials to take into account historical persecution when judging an applicant's refugee status.

The Lautenberg Amendment allowed some 350,000 to 400,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union to gain entry into the United States without having to prove they were individually persecuted.

Lautenberg decided before the 2000 election not to run for a fourth term. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Coalition seeks compensation for refugees from Arab world*By Rachel Pomerance*

NEW YORK (JTA) — An initiative seeking compensation for Jews forced to flee Arab countries during the creation of the State of Israel is gaining steam.

Justice for Jews From Arab Countries was launched Monday to publicize the “historical truth” of Jewish refugees from Arab countries, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, said Monday.

The group claims that roughly 865,000 Jews were forced to flee Arab and Muslim lands because of hostility surrounding the formation of the State of Israel.

That’s more than the number of Palestinian refugees — some 750,000 — who fled or were expelled from Israel during the 1948 War of Independence.

Many of the Jewish refugees were stripped of their property when they fled.

The issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries has been swept under the “Persian carpet,” joked Holbrooke, who is an honorary chairman of the new organization, along with Lord George Weidenfeld of Great Britain’s House of Lords.

Also taking leadership roles are Canadian legislator and human rights lawyer Irwin Cotler and former Knesset speaker Shlomo Hillel, who helped some 100,000 Jews leave Iraq just after Israel’s War of Independence.

The new group was created by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Sephardi Federation and the World Jewish Congress.

The coalition seeks “redress” for Jews displaced from Arab lands. Exactly what form that will take should be determined in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the group says.

“We don’t want to prejudice the outcome. If the Palestinians will be getting financial restitution, then we believe Jewish refugees will be getting financial restitution,” said Stanley Urman, the director of the Washington-based Center for Middle East Peace and the coordinator of the new group.

“We want to make sure that every time the issue of refugees is discussed within the context of the Middle East peace process, then the rights of former Jewish refugees will also be addressed,” he said. “We’re just saying this issue must be dealt with appropriately, both as a matter of law and a matter of equity.”

The group said it plans to coordinate a campaign to collect claims from Jewish refugees, develop a legal committee to document such claims, lobby heads of state and international bodies, mobilize Jewish communal support and back a public education project.

The birth of the new coalition comes five months after Israeli Justice Minister Meir Sheerit announced that his ministry was preserving and computerizing more than 10,000 claims from previous compensation initiatives that had been abandoned.

The ministry has partnered with the Sephardi Federation, which has been publicizing the effort and seeking new claims from Jews around the world.

The ministry’s goal is to gather information on Jewish property in Arab states to counter Palestinian claims to lost property in future negotiations, Sheerit told JTA in June.

Most of the Jewish refugees from Arab lands moved to Israel, where the nascent state undertook a massive effort to absorb and settle them. Today they and their descendants make up about half of Israel’s Jewish population.

In contrast, Arab states largely refused to settle Palestinian refugees, denying them citizenship and forcing them into squalid camps to keep the conflict with Israel alive.

Israeli and Jewish leaders believe that any final agreement with the Palestinians will include financial compensation for Palestinian refugees.

But they reject the idea that refugees and their descendants be allowed to return to Israel, seeing it as tantamount to the demographic destruction of Israel.

Palestinian leaders, however, continue to insist on the “Right of Return.” The issue was a main factor in the collapse of the July 2000 Camp David summit and subsequent peace talks.

The impetus for the new coalition, Urman said, is the prospect of future peace talks, the Justice Ministry push for documentation and the fact that Jewish refugees with first-hand knowledge of their property claims in the Muslim world are dying off.

Until now, Jewish groups and individuals have crusaded for the cause with little support or success. Israel has been too “overwhelmed” fending off Arab aggression to concentrate on compensation, Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, Yehuda Lancry, told JTA.

According to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, until now there was no “vehicle for doing this on a sustained basis or where this could legitimately find expression.”

“The U.N. wasn’t taking it up,” he said.

Justice for Jews From Arab Countries plans to bring the matter to the United Nations, however, asking both formal U.N. delegations and Jewish groups with consultative status to broach the issue.

One basis for the group’s diplomatic efforts will be U.N. Security Council Resolution 242. Since the 1967 Six-Day War, that resolution has served as the basis for land-for-peace negotiations.

That resolution also seeks to settle the refugee problem — without specifying which refugees.

At the least, Jewish officials say, the group will ensure that Israel has the relevant data if peace talks resume.

“We have to be prepared,” Lancry said. “It will help us to reduce the pressure exerted” by the Palestinians on the refugee issue.

The new group is not interested in a lawsuit against the Arab League proposed in June by Amram Attias, president of the International Committee of Jews From Arab Lands, which is under the aegis of the American Sephardi Federation.

“Our priority is to engage in political discussions,” Urman said. “We will not be filing legal claims against any Arab government.”

Attias insisted that his group is still examining the grounds for a lawsuit, but that he would defer to the new coalition.

“Right now, we want to talk in one voice,” he said.

The new group is mounting a campaign to find aging Sephardi Jews, hoping to document both their life stories and their property claims. Previous efforts haven’t had the necessary follow-through. But this time, Urman said, there’s a “commitment by everyone involved to make sure the issue doesn’t fall by the wayside.” □