



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Tisch may lead umbrella group

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations is expected to select James Tisch as the group's next chairman.

Tisch, chairman of the board of the United Jewish Communities and CEO of the Loews Corp., will likely succeed Mortimer Zuckerman as head of the 52-member umbrella group, according to sources.

Tisch was expected to be chosen by the group's nominating committee this week. The full conference will vote on the recommendation before April 30.

Powell: War not for Israel

Secretary of State Colin Powell stressed on Thursday that an expected war against Iraq would not be fought for Israel's benefit.

"It is driven by our own national interests," Powell told the U.S. House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee. "It is driven by us trying to help the United Nations do its job. It is driven by our concern for the people of Iraq."

French Jewish student attacked

French police opened an investigation Thursday after a Jewish student was attacked by masked men who engraved a Star of David in her arm.

Police said three men attacked the 20-year-old law student, "probably with a set of keys," outside her home in the southern city of Aix-en-Provence.

Earlier that evening, the woman had participated in a debate at a local cinema following the screening of a film dealing with media coverage of the Middle East conflict, and had expressed her indignation at the involvement of Palestinian children in the conflict.

Two Israelis killed by army fire

Israeli soldiers killed two Israelis whom they mistook for terrorists near Hebron on Thursday.

According to an army inquiry, a security alert had been declared in the area where the troops spotted the two Israelis, who were armed. Taking them to be terrorists, the army opened fire from a helicopter and from the ground, Israel Radio reported.

Initial reports suggested that Palestinian gunmen wearing Israeli army uniforms opened fire on the car the Israelis were traveling in, but the army later confirmed that the men had been killed by friendly fire.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Pro-Israel push pays off on campus, but impact of Iraq war unpredictable

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Pro-Israel activists are gaining ground on campus, but some wonder how an expected war against Iraq could change the equation.

The anti-war movement, many of whose leaders also head pro-Palestinian groups, is the newest venue for pro-Palestinian activity on campus. Jewish officials fear the inclusion of the Palestinian agenda under the anti-war umbrella could help the Palestinians win broader support among young Americans.

They fear, too, that if war with Iraq fails or drags on, it will empower the anti-war movement and, with it, pro-Palestinian activists, since leaders of the anti-war movement claim that American policy is formulated to serve Israel's interests.

But anti-war fervor so far has failed to make great headway on campus: Most students are ambivalent about war and view the anti-war movement as a hodgepodge of anti-establishment causes.

At the same time, Mideast dialogue groups are on the rise, contributing to a climate that is friendlier toward Israel than at any time since the intifada began more than two years ago.

When it began, the intifada sparked a burst of pro-Palestinian activity that in some cases inspired acts of anti-Semitism on college campuses. Charges against Israel — couched in progressive language that attracted liberal academics — stunned Jewish students and their campus organizations, which were ill-prepared to respond.

Two years later, a confluence of factors have bolstered the confidence of pro-Israel activists on campus:

- fortification of pro-Israel activists. American Jewish organizations have responded to Mideast activism with new models of pro-Israel advocacy for students. The effort has led to effective, pro-active programming for Israel and a cadre of savvy student campus advocates.

- the failure of anti-Israel strategies. The divestment movement — a crusade for universities to drop investments in companies that do business in Israel — is widely regarded as a failure. Divestment petitions were rejected by university presidents from Harvard to the University of Michigan, and even engendered counter-statements of solidarity with Israel.

In addition, anti-war rallies on college campuses across America last week failed to mobilize a large amount of pro-Palestinian activism.

- less confrontation. The current academic year has seen a growth of Mideast dialogue groups and administration-sponsored lectures. Alternatively, many Jewish groups have discouraged followers from reacting to fringe pro-Palestinian activity.

- the impending war with Iraq. The movement has had contradictory effects: While it may have exposed some students to the Palestinian agenda, it also has diverted the attention of many potential Palestinian sympathizers who are too preoccupied with the conflict with Iraq to worry about other issues.

In addition, a small "pro-America" movement has arisen in reaction to the anti-war movement — and it carries a pro-Israel bent. In any case, polls have shown that most American students mirror general American public opinion, which is pro-Israel.

Still, Jewish officials are cautious, and say war against Iraq could open a new front for Jewish students.

The anti-war movement is a "gift from the Lord" for pro-Palestinian activists, said

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S.: Israel should ease up

The United States reportedly expects Israel to take steps to help strengthen the standing of the new Palestinian Authority prime minister. The Americans have asked Israel to loosen restrictions on the Palestinians, but do not expect any steps that would compromise security, Army Radio reported.

Saddam helps terrorists' families

Saddam Hussein distributed \$260,000 to families of Palestinian suicide bombers Wednesday, in checks of \$10,000 each.

The money brings the total amount Iraq has contributed to the Palestinian intifada to more than \$35 million. Israel says the payments prove the Iraqi leader's links to terror.

Army recalls defective gas masks

The Israeli army is recalling some 1,000 defective gas mask kits for infants. The problem, discovered by a soldier at a distribution center, is a defect in the connection for the tube that provides air and determines the level of protection from possibly contaminated air.

The army called on all citizens who picked up the kits in Haifa and the Greater Tel Aviv area between Feb. 1 and March 7 to exchange them.

Palestinian toll estimated

Some 1,945 Palestinians have been killed since the intifada erupted two and a half years ago, according to Israel's defense establishment. Figures released by the Palestinian Authority this week put the fatalities at 2,929, including suicide bombers and people the Palestinians claim died because delays at roadblocks held up medical care.

According to the human rights group B'Tselem, 1,887 Palestinians have died since the outbreak of the intifada.



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Jeffrey Ross, director of campus affairs for the Anti-Defamation League. "It is an opportunity for them to make their case to much larger numbers of people, and to do it on an issue that is of more direct concern to most Americans than the plight of the Palestinians."

"The fact that the" anti-war "movement is sort of peppered with anti-Israel leaders and spokespeople, we never know where it's going to emerge," said Wayne Firestone, director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, a coordinating body for Jewish groups on campus.

To be sure, anti-Israel activity still pops up on campus independently of the anti-war movement. At Rutgers University, banners at two student centers call for the liberation of Palestine "from the river to the sea," and a Palestinian film festival recently aired at Columbia University.

For the moment, however, the distraction of war and the influx of pro-Israel resources has allowed Israel advocates to make headway.

Even at Berkeley — site of some of the most violent anti-Israel activism during the intifada — "things are really quite positive," in a "worst-case scenario kind of way," said Berkeley Hillel's executive director, Adam Weisberg.

An average student walking across campus on an average day might hear something negative about Israel. But his operation is in "triage mode," he said, with new resources offering higher-profile programs, cultural and educational events and advocacy training.

The Berkeley administration also helped fund speeches on campus this year by former Mideast envoy Dennis Ross and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Another development is the birth of dialogue groups on campuses across the country. At the University of Illinois, dialogue between Muslim and Jewish groups brought the two together to respond to attacks on each side.

When an anti-Semitic editorial ran in the campus paper, the campus Hillel's head, Alison Siegel, came home to find messages of sympathy from her Muslim friends. Likewise, when a Jewish activist ran an anti-Arab ad campaign in the campus paper, Siegel tried to reassure the Arab community.

Warmer relations haven't curtailed political demonstrations on both sides, but have lessened the verbal intimidation used to be associated with them, Siegel said.

At Georgetown University, five grass-roots discussion groups have sprung up for Jews, Christians and Muslims, according to Rabbi Harold White, the university's senior Jewish chaplain.

Georgetown's Students for Middle East Peace, a dialogue group created during the rocky spring semester last year, hosted a conference on campus two weeks ago that drew up to 60 students from East Coast colleges, The Hoya newspaper reported.

The university also has hosted several "Abraham Salons," an interfaith dialogue based on the recent book "Abraham," which presents the figure of the Hebrew patriarch as a potential facilitator for interfaith activity.

But the ADL's Ross said the impact of dialogue groups depends on progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Shira Levine, a University of Michigan sophomore who founded a pro-Israel outreach and education group on campus, agrees that students react to events on the ground.

But "what it means to build peace on campus, in the world, is to start building your bridge, even if you don't know if it will take you to the other side," she said.

Levine's group, the Progressive Israel Alliance, invited members of Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, sponsors of last fall's national conference at the University of Michigan for investment from Israel, to Hillel to discuss the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When Levine stopped by a recent campus rally, a pro-Palestinian activist invited her over for a potluck dinner.

"I feel like that matters. I feel like there's someone to listen to on the other side," she said.

For both Levine and Siegel, the goal is an improved, educated atmosphere on campus.

"I can't dictate Middle East policy," Siegel said. "I don't even know what I would say if I could, but I can work to make this a better community and this a better learning environment." □

JEWISH WORLD

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

New Hillel plants 'seed of hope' for Argentina's strapped community

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES — A "seed of hope" for a Jewish community in crisis. That's how the executive director of Argentina's first Hillel characterized the center's opening.

Indeed, Tuesday's festive opening was one big Jewish party, replete with music, laughter, circle dances, hugs and cries of "mazel tov."

Hundreds of Jews from the United States, Israel, Argentina and other Latin American countries gathered for the celebration.

Showing their support for the financially beleaguered Jewish community with their attendance were many prominent Jewish philanthropic and communal leaders, including mega-philanthropists Edgar Bronfman, Lynn Schusterman and Michael Steinhardt, all of whom serve on the International Board of Governors of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

With the economic crisis having pushed nearly one-third of Argentina's Jewish community below the poverty level, the new Hillel offered a glimmer of a better future.

While most Argentine Jewish institutions are shrinking or merging — or focusing on humanitarian relief — the opening of the Hillel represents a "hinge" for the Jewish community, said Gabriel Trajtenberg, the center's 37-year-old executive director.

The sentiment was echoed by many of the invited guests.

"People who know me generally accuse me of being pessimistic. And more often than not, they are right," Steinhardt told JTA, seated at the edge of the stage used for the ceremony. "But then, sometimes, there is a magical experience, a moment that allows one to dream about a stronger and brighter Jewish future. This night was one of those moments."

Schusterman described the event as "uplifting for the whole community."

She said it was particularly "emotional and special to see these young people and feel the impact they are going to have in the community."

Others attending the event included Stephen Hoffman, president of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of the North American federation system; Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress and president of the Claims Conference; Israel's ambassador to Argentina, Benjamin Oron; and Michael Schneider, former president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Local Jewish leaders were also very much in evidence, including the president of the AMIA Jewish community center, Abraham Kaul; the president of DAIA, the political umbrella organization for Argentina's Jewish community, Jose Hercman; and the Jewish Agency for Israel's top local official, Arieh Avir.

There were also hundreds of students who had already joined Hillel Argentina, whose target audience is some 9,000 Jewish students enrolled in the two public and 15 private universities in Buenos Aires.

Last August, Hillel opened temporary quarters in Argentina. According to Trajtenberg, 1,600 young Jews have already enrolled in Hillel activities, and 1,000 are participating in a weekly regular activity.

Bronfman alluded to the first Hillel to open in Latin America — in Montevideo, Uruguay — and said that the new Hillel in Buenos Aires proves that the organization "will continue growing" throughout the region. Indeed, Hillel centers are expected to open in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Santiago de Chile.

Along with classes in subjects ranging from languages to art, Hillel also offers a center — Tzedek Hillel, with more than 300 volunteers — that reaches out to help financially strapped Jews and non-Jews.

For Nancy Rovner, 24, a physiotherapy student from the northern Argentine city of Tucuman, the new Hillel was just what she needed.

"I am alone here. I need the Jewish connection," she told JTA.

"To be honest, I like the sports activities offered by Hillel," said Guido Feldman, an industrial engineering student who is also 24.

But he had another reason for joining Hillel.

"I also want to find a Jewish girlfriend." □

Groups assail anti-abortion bill

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs and Hadassah are assailing the Senate's approval of a bill banning so-called partial-birth abortions.

"The United States Senate today took a dangerous step toward revoking a woman's right to reproductive freedom," said Michael Bohnen, JCPA's chairman.

"The legislation passed today in fact enforces broad restrictions on abortion, with vague wording that does not make an exemption when necessary to preserve a woman's health."

The ban passed the Senate on Thursday. The House of Representatives is expected to take up the bill in the spring.

20 'Righteous Gentiles' honored

Some 20 Hungarians were lauded for working to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Since 1989, when diplomatic contacts were re-established between Hungary and Israel, more than 500 Hungarians have received "Righteous Gentile" awards from Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Israeli author slaps Diaspora

Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua likened the Jewish experience in the Diaspora to masturbation.

Yehoshua, one of Israel's leading novelists, told the Jerusalem Post that the "exile experience" has grown into an "integral" part of Jewish identity that pales compared with "the real thing" of living in Israel. "Diaspora Judaism is masturbation," Yehoshua told Post editors and reporters.

Azeri synagogue dedicated

A synagogue was dedicated in the Azeri capital of Baku last Sunday.

The synagogue, which will serve the city's Ashkenazi community, was built with funds donated by local and international sponsors.

Among those attending the ceremony were leaders of Azerbaijan's Shi'ite Muslim majority.

Boston Jews aid bomb victims

The Jewish community of Boston donated \$20,000 to assist victims of last week's Haifa bus bombing.

Community leaders promised to raise more funds if needed, according to a statement issued by the Israel office of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. Members of the Boston Jewish community, which has a sister city relationship with Haifa, knew some of those killed and wounded in the attack, including Tal Kerman, who visited Boston as part of a student delegation from her high school.

Seventeen people were killed in the attack, which injured more than 50.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish Democrats condemn Moran as party politics infuse controversy

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Six Jewish Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives joined the chorus of criticism against U.S. Rep. James Moran (D-Va.) this week, saying they hoped this would be the controversial lawmaker's last term in office.

Nearly two weeks after Moran made comments blaming the American Jewish community for the impending war in Iraq, the lawmaker continues to be criticized from across the political spectrum.

Party politics clearly played a role in how the Moran controversy was playing out here.

Meanwhile, in the midst of apologizing for his remarks, Moran has gotten himself into trouble once again.

The American Jewish Committee condemned Moran's comments to the Roll Call newspaper Thursday, in which he said, "It's unhealthy for the American political process for any group within our society to be able to decide who should and who shouldn't represent a constituency."

The comment came amid calls for Moran's resignation by local Jewish leaders and amid his own prediction that Jews would mount a strong campaign to defeat him.

"In suggesting that one group — the Jewish community — will decide who represents his district, he has repeated the allegation of undue Jewish influence," said David Bernstein, Washington area director of the AJCommittee.

Moran told a town hall meeting with constituents March 3, "If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this," according to the Virginia-area Connection newspapers.

He has since apologized repeatedly, telling JTA, "I slipped up and I said something that has been properly taken as offensive."

On Wednesday, the six Democratic Jewish congressmen — several of whom had previously endorsed Moran and called him a friend of Israel — sent a letter to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), saying they hoped Moran would not run for re-election next year.

"Should he seek re-election in 2004, however, we cannot and will not support his candidacy," said the letter, which was signed by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), Martin Frost (D-Texas), Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), Sander Levin (D-Mich.), Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.).

Signatories said Thursday that they tried to limit the number of people on the letter, and did not circulate it to the full Jewish caucus. Several other Jewish lawmakers said they were unaware of the letter, but would have signed had they been asked.

Lantos, Frost, Cardin and Levin were four of 11 Jewish lawmakers who signed a letter to Moran's constituents last October, characterizing Moran as a "strong supporter of Israel's right to security and sovereignty."

The letter was perplexing to many at the time because of Moran's negative record on Israel-related issues and his clashes with pro-Israel activists in the past.

In addition, he was widely expected to win re-election, and in fact won by a substantial margin.

Now, Jewish lawmakers are saying the October letter was an

attempt to help Moran gain favor in the Jewish community, and in turn to aid Democratic efforts to regain a majority in the House of Representatives.

"I signed it because I think it's very important that we have a Congress that's Democratic," Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) said in a telephone interview on Thursday.

"And based on his record at the time, I didn't believe he was anti-Semitic," said Frank, who said Moran no longer has his support.

Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) told JTA that Moran came to him in a Capitol elevator last fall and asked him to sign the letter. Berman did, but said he almost immediately regretted it.

"I thought, within a very short time after I signed that letter, that I had done a very stupid thing," Berman said. "I didn't need the more recent comments to convince me I made a mistake."

Meanwhile, party politics were on full display surrounding the Moran controversy this week.

Republican leaders — including the White House and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) — took their Democratic counterparts to task for not speaking out quickly against Moran, calling it a "double standard."

"It is important that the Democratic Party, both in Virginia and nationally, join and condemn Rep. Moran's hurtful and fraudulent linkage of Jewish influence to the problems America faces as a nation," said Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), the only Republican Jew in the House of Representatives.

With the Republican Party making constant inroads into the American Jewish community, Moran's comments presented an opportunity for Republican leaders to show that they were supportive of the interests of Jews, and highlight a perceived contrast to their Democratic counterparts.

But the Democrats took only hours to respond, with both Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) chastising Moran in strong terms.

Democratic leaders say it is unfair to scold them for not being bolder in speaking out against Moran. They note that the National Jewish Democratic Council was one of the first organizations to criticize Moran's comments.

They also say Democrats spoke out against Moran much quicker than Republicans spoke out against Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), who was forced to resign his leadership post last year after being accused of making racist comments.

Waxman said the few days it took to get his letter out was due to logistics, including travel back to Washington and garnering co-signers. Party politics was not a factor, he said.

"As a Democrat, I would hate to see a seat go to the Republican side of the aisle," he said. "But I don't think Jim Moran ought to be a member of Congress."

Rabbi Jack Moline of Virginia, who initially led the call for Moran's resignation, said he has been satisfied with the Democratic Party's response to Moran's comments.

Moline and other Jewish leaders had been planning to meet with Moran on Thursday but canceled the meeting, in part based on comments Moran made that suggested he was expecting Jewish leaders to vent to him.

"He still doesn't get it," Moline said. "It's not time for a meeting yet."

Through a spokesman, Moran said he intends to seek re-election, and is continuing to reach out to Jewish leaders and others he angered in his district. □