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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

DeLay blasts human rights report

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) blasted the State Department's report on Israel's actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Accepting an award Wednesday at the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews' Stand for Israel Day in Washington, DeLay said the report, released this week, "compares the human rights record of a free, tolerant and pluralistic nation with that of a terrorist network. There is no comparison, and to assert one is ridiculous."

More than 600 Christian leaders attended the event in Washington, which also honored Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.).

Speakers included Attorney General John Ashcroft, Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and Israel's ambassador to the United States, Daniel Ayalon.

6 Palestinians killed

Six Palestinians were killed and five Israeli soldiers wounded in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinians said four unarmed Palestinians were killed and nine others wounded Wednesday night during clashes around Rafiah, in the southern part of the Gaza Strip.

Four soldiers were lightly wounded when a bomb detonated beneath their tank.

In the West Bank, Israeli troops shot and killed a wanted Hamas member who resisted arrest in Nablus. Palestinians said a teen-ager was killed by army fire in Kalkilya.

Israeli troops operating in the West Bank overnight arrest 19 wanted Palestinians. Three Palestinians were suspected of planning suicide attacks.

Lieberman raises \$3 million

Democratic presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) raised several million dollars less in the first quarter of 2003 than some of his challengers.

The Lieberman campaign announced Wednesday that it had raised \$3 million since the year began.

Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and John Edwards (D-N.C.) received close to \$7 million each.

Lieberman spokesman Jano Cabrera said the showing is due to a late start in fund raising, because the campaign's finance director did not begin her work until late February.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

At AIPAC conference, candidates shake hands — and hope for support

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Along one hallway in a Washington hotel Sunday night, the first signs of how Jewish support for the 2004 Democratic presidential challengers will be doled out came into focus.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), in his element and among his base of support, worked a shoulder to shoulder room of loyalists and college students. When he tried to leave he was encircled, forced to take baby steps for close to an hour before he reached the exit.

Howard Dean, the anti-war former governor of Vermont, talked shop with a crowd of unfamiliar faces in a room half the size of Lieberman's.

While he walked virtually anonymously to the reception room, he left in a huddle similar to the Jewish senator's.

And Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), the former House Democratic leader, shook hands in the corner of an open room at the end of the hallway, with as many people interested in the food platters — which had survived longer than the other presidential contenders' spreads — as those who wanted to speak to the candidate.

While it is by no means a scientific survey, the crowds and enthusiasm at the receptions following the first day of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference gave a clue as to where Jewish support is going in the primary election.

The fact that five presidential hopefuls attended the conference — Sens. John Edwards (D-N.C.) and Bob Graham (D-Fla.) were at Monday night's banquet — showed how much influence the Jewish community is expected to wield in the upcoming primary season.

Political analysts often say that the Jewish community's influence in politics goes well beyond its percentage of the electorate: American Jews are more apt to give money to presidential candidates than are other demographic groups, and do the grass-roots work that campaigns thrive on.

Those who come to an AIPAC conference have proven that they are involved in the political process, making them a perfect place for candidates to make their presidential pitch.

"The men and women of AIPAC, including the college students, are as politically active collectively as any group in America," said Steve Grossman, a former AIPAC president and chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who is now advising Dean.

Officially there is no fund raising at the AIPAC event, as both the candidates and AIPAC staffers often remind people.

In fact, none of the contenders was invited to speak at the conference, though all were offered the opportunity to host a reception and attend Monday's gala.

"If we invited them all to speak, we wouldn't have time for our program, which examines the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship," AIPAC spokeswoman Rebecca Dinar said.

Still, more than half of the candidates made their presence known, largely because the next hand a candidate shakes at an AIPAC event might lead to a check in the future.

"It's a good way to get influential, high profile and often wealthy members of your core constituency," said Ken Goldstein, a professor of political science and Judaic

MIDEAST FOCUS

Terror planners arrested

Three Israeli Arabs have been arrested on suspicion of planning to carry out a terrorist attack for Islamic Jihad.

According to details released Thursday, the three residents of the northern village of Manda were detained two weeks ago. They are suspected of planning to carry out an attack in the north of the country, possibly against a café or disco in Haifa.

Killer virus hits Israeli?

An Israeli man was hospitalized with what may be the country's first case of a deadly respiratory virus.

Five days after returning from a trip to Singapore, the man, in his 30s, was admitted to a hospital suffering from fever, muscle pain and breathing difficulties.

A hospital official said Wednesday that the patient was isolated from other patients out of concern that he might be carrying the SARS virus, the daily Ha'aretz reported.

Meanwhile, Israel's Foreign Ministry is issuing instructions to diplomats serving in countries hit by the outbreak of the illness.

The ministry has recalled the families of diplomats posted in Hong Kong, but for the time being has refrained from issuing a similar directive to diplomats' families in Vietnam and China.

Transplants link Jew, Arab

An Israeli Jewish and an Israeli Arab family exchanged kidneys. Ili Halun, a 45-year-old truck driver from Acre, received a kidney this week from Yigal Azeri, a 38-year-old resident of Kibbutz Naot Mordechai, in an operation at Haifa's Rambam Hospital.

Meanwhile, at the Schneider Children's Hospital in Petach Tikva, Azeri's 10-year-old son received a kidney donated by Halun's wife, Lina.



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studies at the University of Wisconsin. "Grass roots are important but grass tops are important, and these are grass tops." That theory does not hold just for presidential candidates, but for anyone with political aspirations.

That's why half of the Senate and close to half of the U.S. House of Representatives came to AIPAC's Monday night gala.

"You've got enormously active people in that hall, who are central to the political aspirations of the other people in that room," Grossman said.

Indeed, at the pre-gala cocktail reception, lawmakers and aspirants grabbed as many hands as possible, and business cards were exchanged freely. One of Graham's staffers carried a note pad, taking down names of each person the presidential hopeful met.

Many have wondered whether Lieberman's entry into the presidential field would hurt Jewish fund raising for other Democratic hopefuls.

Some in the Jewish community have joked that the need for Jewish money has prompted presidential candidates — including Dean, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and former NATO commander Wesley Clark — to speak at length about their Jewish connections, trying to balance Lieberman's perceived advantage.

"When I initially got into this I thought it was going to hurt, but it hasn't hurt," Dean told JTA. "Joe's constituency is very different than mine."

Gephardt said that attendance at one night's event is not indicative of the big picture.

"I've raised money from people all over the country," he told JTA. "All kinds of people give me money because they think I do a good job."

AIPAC may not be the best gauge for the Jewish community's support of candidates. Goldstein says AIPAC voters are more hawkish and conservative than they used to be, something that would help Lieberman but hurt Dean and Gephardt.

Many other Jews don't vote solely on Israel issues but on domestic policy, which leaves the field much more open.

But there are some Jews that vote based on a candidate's take on Israel, especially at AIPAC. And perhaps one of the stronger candidates for 2004 among this group — President Bush — didn't need a reception room.

"I probably will support George Bush again, and I'm a life-long Democrat," said Anita Gold of Boca Raton, Fla.

Bush's support among the Jewish community has grown consistently over the last two years, as his rhetoric on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has moved closer to the positions of Israel and AIPAC.

That makes the Jewish money left for Democratic candidates all the more valuable this time around. □

Holocaust denier not freed

TORONTO (JTA) — Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel will remain in a Canadian detention center because his white supremacist views could spur others to commit acts of violence, a Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board ruled.

Zundel, 64, who characterizes the Holocaust as a Jewish hoax, is wanted in his native Germany for violating anti-hate laws.

"Mr. Zundel is a lightning rod for individuals who believe in the neo-Nazi white supremacist philosophy," Dave Stewart, a Canadian Security Intelligence Service official, told the IRB on March 31. "He sows the seeds and other people build on that."

Zundel has also ignored a ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Commission that he must stop using his Web site to disseminate racial hatred. □

Israel crowns beauty queen

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A recent Jerusalem high school graduate was crowned Miss Israel.

Sivan Klein, 18, will represent Israel at the Miss Universe Pageant in Puerto Rico. Klein, who concentrated in biology and was a counselor in the Israeli Scouts in high school, said Tuesday she wants to be an anti-aircraft instructor in the army, and hopes to study psychiatry or criminology. □

JEWISH WORLD

Shimon Peres heckled

Shimon Peres was called a murderer by Muslim and pro-Palestinian students while giving a speech in England.

The former Israeli prime minister was heckled as he addressed a National Union of Students conference in the northern English town of Blackpool.

Setting out his vision for a post-Saddam Middle East as well as his support for the war, Peres appeared unfazed by the protests.

He later spoke in London at a think tank, the Institute of Public Policy Research, where he said the defeat of the Iraqi dictator would be a triumph for the Arab world.

Chirac sorry for vandalism

French President Jacques Chirac apologized to Britain's Queen Elizabeth for swastikas daubed on a World War I cemetery in France.

"Know that at a time when your soldiers are engaged in combat, the thoughts of the French are naturally with them," Chirac said.

The cemetery, containing the gravestones of more than 10,000 British soldiers who died in World War I, was defaced last week, the French media reported earlier this week.

Fund wants Spielberg's help

Germany's slave labor fund will seek help from Steven Spielberg to record testimony from World War II survivors.

Officials with the multibillion-dollar fund, some of which is to be used for education, said they would seek help from Spielberg to interview up to 1,000 former slave laborers.

Spielberg's U.S.-based foundation has interviewed tens of thousands of survivors in an attempt to record the memories of the Holocaust.

Jews for Jesus in Brazil

Jews for Jesus is distributing leaflets to Jewish beach-goers in Rio de Janeiro.

The distribution of the leaflets by the Christian missionary group comes as the group intensifies its activities in cities throughout Brazil.

It is not clear how the country's Jewish community will react.

Online seder listing

A listing of community Passover seders is available online.

The federation system has listed community seders throughout North America along with links to general information about Jewish holidays and customs.

The Web site is located at: www.ujc.org/seder.

WAR IN IRAQ

As U.S. troops reach Baghdad, rabbis still struggle with position

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA)— As U.S. forces pushed to the outskirts of Baghdad this week, 350 Conservative rabbis were embroiled in a fierce Iraq conflict of their own.

Opinions varied so widely and discussions lasted so long at the Rabbinical Assembly's annual conference in Los Angeles that the participating rabbis put off an equally controversial debate on homosexuality.

At the last minute, the group sent a final position paper on Iraq to its executive committee so the rabbis could deal with other resolutions before adjourning Thursday.

When the executive committee finally issued a resolution, it sent several messages.

The rabbis supported the allied coalition's aims to "remove the threats posed by terrorism and weapons of mass destruction," expressed "maximum concern" for noncombatants, lauded U.S. troops, and underlined that Judaism holds peace as a "supreme value" but also allows defensive wars.

"The American Jewish community as a whole had been ambivalent" going into this war, said Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the assembly, "and that gets reflected" in such official positions.

Weeks into Operation Iraqi Freedom, it seems, the more liberal streams of American Judaism are more divided than ever about the war.

The Orthodox community, in contrast, is standing firmly behind the war.

For months, rabbis of all denominations have been sermonizing across the board on Iraq, finding Jewish reasons to rally behind the anti-war movement or wholeheartedly support the Bush administration.

That debate crystallized one week into the war, when Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, who had been an outspoken critic of the war, seemed to backtrack in a New York Times article.

Months earlier, Schorsch had told JTA that he feared the Iraq war campaign was a political "sideshow" that would lead to a war that "is not a turkey shoot," and on Purim, the eve of the war, he warned of a "dark" period.

Once the U.S.-led invasion began, Schorsch asked the seminary's public relations team to retract critical comments he had made about the war because, he told the Times, "I did not think that I should go on a crusade" while the battle raged.

Schorsch wouldn't discuss the matter further, but other Conservative colleagues defended his actions.

"I don't think that was a retraction," Meyers said. "It's often very difficult for public figures to be thoughtful about a subject without being cast as retreating."

One thing is clear: As the war unfolds, the other liberal movements remain similarly conflicted. The Reform movement's rabbinical union, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, met in Washington last week and could agree only on a resolution that prayed for the safety of U.S. troops and acknowledged that its ranks were "of varied opinion" about the war.

The smaller Reconstructionist movement is also deeply divided over the war.

That movement's three main bodies — the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College — issued a joint statement March 21 that referred to a "range of opinion and emotion at this moment."

Orthodox leaders, meanwhile, remain almost of a single mind about the war.

The Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America issued a joint statement backing Bush after the war's first strikes last month, offering prayers for its "noble objectives" and for peace.

"Usually there's two Jews, three opinions; but for us, this was one of the easiest positions we've had to take," said Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union.

In fact, Rabbi Hershel Billet, president of the Orthodox rabbinical union, said that "99 and nine-tenths" of the Orthodox community backs the war.

"Sometimes," he said, "war is a necessary evil." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

**For Judeophile in Jordan,
studying in Israel is a dream**

By Matthew Gutman

AMMAN, Jordan (JTA) — Aviv's mother marvels at the way her son, perhaps one of Jordan's only self-avowed Judeophiles, references the Bible in discussing contemporary politics in the Middle East.

"You see," says Aviv professorially, "the borders of Israel are supposed to stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates. That is what it says in the Bible: Numbers, Chapter 2."

Aviv, who has cat eyes and receding hair combed straight back on his head, says, "Who knows? Maybe I have Jewish blood somewhere in these veins."

Aviv — a Christian whose family asked that his Arabic name not be used — stands in stark contrast to the prevailing sentiment in Jordan.

With the local and Arabic satellite channels searing the suffering of the Iraqi people onto Jordanians' minds, anything American, British and especially Jewish is taboo.

Thus his courtship with Hebrew is conducted under supreme secrecy.

A crafter of mosaics who once owned a thriving arts shop near the Roman ruins in Jerash, Aviv has developed numerous friendships with visiting Israelis who were stunned to hear his astoundingly good Hebrew.

His only formal training was a six-week course conducted at a local tourism college in Amman. The rest he picked up from tourists and long hours of studying after work.

Now his Hebrew books — Amman booksellers have since taken such texts off the racks — are stashed away under the family's Armenian Orthodox Bible. They stand beside the heirlooms his family managed to cart with them from Jerusalem to Jordan following their displacement in 1948.

Among the books are Arabic-Hebrew dictionaries and one hefty centennial celebration book called *Sefer Hameah*, or Book of the Century, which one of the Jewish tourists in Jerash gave him back in 1997. He flips through it and lightly touches the pictures of some of his favorite Israeli icons: former military leaders and politicians Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan.

An indelible line has been drawn from the American campaign in Iraq, perceived as "occupation" in Jordan, to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Palestinians and Jordanians here are convinced that Israel and its Jewish lobby in Washington initiated the Iraq war.

Siri Nasir, a professor of sociology at the University of Amman, told JTA that nothing since Egypt's leader Gamal Abdul Nasser called for a pan-Arab nation some 40 years ago has so unified the Arab street.

At the center of the hatred is the American government, which, said the professor, "is financed and supported by the Jewish lobby."

"Palestinians are angry to begin with," he said. "They are now more than ever full of anger and hatred towards the U.S. and U.K."

So undesirable is any reference to the United States that "Uncle Sam's" restaurant in Amman, whose menu consists almost entirely of versions of hamburgers and fries, has unceremoniously dropped "Uncle" from its name.

But it is Palestinians on the street who seethe the most.

During last Friday's anti-war rally in Amman's Wehdat refugee district, home to 250,000 Palestinian refugees, the liberation of Iraq was uttered in the same breath as the liquidation of the "Zionist state."

A phalanx of Jordanian police in riot gear stood at the outskirts of the district, tapping their clubs in their hands. It was a solemn reminder of what happens when demonstrations too heavily criticize the government.

Aviv is even unique in his own family. Isam, his older brother, disapproves of Aviv's Judeophilia.

"We were taught for a long time that Jews are the enemy," said the gruff mechanic. "Just like Jews are afraid to say they are Jews in Arab counties, that is how we feel about speaking Hebrew here. It is too much trouble."

His family begged that neither Aviv's picture nor his real name appear in print.

The family belongs to the minuscule Aramaic Christian group that numbers fewer than 1,000 in Jordan. They speak Aramaic, which was the language of Jesus, and have a tortured history of flight and persecution.

Turkey expelled them in the late 19th century. They fled to Syria and ultimately settled in the Jerusalem area from which they fled in 1948, during Israel's War of Independence.

Lamia, Aviv's mother, was born to a Christian family in Bethlehem in 1941.

She struggles with her son's identity, yet is resigned to what she calls his "quirks."

In truth, she gushes, "I wish I had more sons like Aviv, but all this Israel business concerns me."

Aviv's politics are a mixture of hard-line Likud and Shimon Peres' "New Middle East."

"Likud," he says, "is much better than Labor. In this region you need an iron fist, and Labor cannot provide that for Israel."

Most strikingly, Aviv displays an intense dislike of Palestinian Muslims.

"All the problems of this region are their fault. When I see a suicide bomber I think he is an animal, not a human," he says.

On the other hand, he envisions a Middle East where Israeli traders can flow through open borders to do business in Arab capitals. For six glorious years, Jordan benefited from Israeli tourism and business, and Jordanians want that to resume, he says.

When the Palestinian intifada erupted two and a half years ago, Jordan's tourism trade dried up. Eight months later, Aviv closed his Jerash shop and found work as a bookkeeper in Amman.

"We have to let in Israelis to do business here, to bring the West to us. We will be their ambassadors to the Arab world and they ours to the West," he says.

It will be Jordan's task, as it is now, he says, to protect Israel from the Arab countries to the East.

"We are a natural buffer zone. Even if you ask a child on the street why Jordan was created, he will tell you it was to protect Israel."

But the days of a warm peace between the two nations are likely far off. Aviv, who longs to study Hebrew in Israel at the Akiva Ulpan in Netanya, knows that any trip under the current circumstances could be "very problematic."

Visas to Israel are nearly impossible to get, as the Jordanian authorities are loath to grant them.

Even then, the secret police is highly suspicious of Jordanians who travel to the Jewish state. □