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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Crown Heights conviction

Lemrick Nelson was found guilty of violating the civil rights of yeshiva scholar Yankel Rosenbaum during the 1991 Crown Heights riots.

However, the jury in the civil trial found Wednesday that Nelson was not responsible for Rosenbaum's death.

As a result of the conviction, which came a day after the jury said it was deadlocked, Nelson faces up to 10 years in jail. [Page 4]

3 Palestinians killed in Gaza Strip

Israeli soldiers killed three armed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The army said a military helicopter fired a missile at the men, who were throwing grenades at an Israeli patrol.

Palestinian sources said the men were Palestinian policemen and were killed by Israeli tank fire while at their post. Israeli troops backed by helicopters and tanks entered the town of Khan Yunis overnight and destroyed several abandoned buildings that had been used to launch rocket and mortar attacks at Israeli targets.

Palestinians said some 20 people were wounded in the operation.

The incursion came hours after 10 Israeli soldiers were wounded in a Palestinian mortar attack on a nearby base and three Israelis were lightly hurt in a rocket attack on the Negev town of Sderot.

More rockets were fired at Sderot on Wednesday, but caused no injuries.

Jewish man beaten in Berlin

An Orthodox Jew was beaten up in Berlin.

Tuesday's attack on the 19-year-old, who wears a black hat and sports a beard, occurred in the Berlin subway.

Three youths made anti-Semitic remarks to the man.

They then followed him out of the subway, throwing fruit at him and asking if he is Jewish.

They beat him when he refused to answer.

The men are believed to be of Arab descent, police said.

Earlier this week, a non-Jewish man who was wearing a Star of David also was beaten in Berlin by attackers who mistook him for a Jew.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

After controversial election battles, AIPAC reaches out to black caucus

By Eli Kintisch

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As it gears up for a struggle over the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee is making special overtures toward the Congressional Black Caucus, a group with which it has had rough relations in the recent past.

As part of its annual Washington convention, the pro-Israel lobby honored the caucus chair, Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), and the rest of the caucus at a special dinner March 30, attended by roughly 1,000 AIPAC donors from around the country.

Then, on April 24 in New York, AIPAC's executive director, Howard Kohr, joined other Jewish community leaders for a lunch with rap mogul Russell Simmons, who has tried to promote better relations between the caucus and the Jewish community.

With Congress focused on domestic affairs, it may be too early to judge how effective AIPAC's efforts have been to improve support from the black caucus on Middle East-related resolutions and initiatives.

But the first test of that support suggests a decidedly mixed result: An April letter to President Bush that AIPAC backed, expressing concerns about aspects of the U.S.-supported road map, was signed by 313 House members — but only 18 of 39 members of the black caucus.

An AIPAC official said the purpose of the March dinner was to continue efforts to "strengthen relations between our community and members of the Congressional Black Caucus."

Another goal was to honor Cummings "and the members of the CBC for their long-standing support of Israel and to reaffirm to our own community that most members of the caucus support a strong and secure Israel."

Since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, some CBC members have been among the most outspoken critics of resolutions they consider too biased in Israel's favor. These include John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), as well as former members Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) and Earl Hilliard (D-Ala.).

In May 2002, only 22 members of the caucus — which then numbered 38 — voted for a resolution expressing "solidarity with Israel." Five voted against the resolution, and 11 skipped or voted "present."

The resolution, which made only a brief reference to Palestinian suffering from Israel's anti-terror measures, passed the House by a vote of 352-21, with 61 members voting "present" or skipping the roll call.

"For most black members of Congress, the Middle East is not high on their agenda," said David Bositis, an expert on black politics at the Washington-based Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies. But "many of their supporters see the Palestinians as getting a raw deal" under Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Experts say that blacks and Jews agree on many political issues. The two groups strengthened their ties during the civil rights era, when Jews were an important ally to black groups, but they have frayed in recent years over such issues as affirmative action.

In the 2002 election cycle, wealthy Jewish donors from around the country, many of them AIPAC members, supported Democratic primary challengers against incumbents McKinney and Hilliard.

After bitter and expensive primary fights, the pair were ousted by black challengers, leading to accusations from black congressmen that outsiders were meddling in their

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon, Abbas to meet Saturday

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, are to meet in Jerusalem on Saturday night.

Palestinian sources said Abbas would call on Israel to accept the U.S.-backed "road map" for peace as is, Israel Radio reported.

At Israel's Cabinet meeting Wednesday, Sharon told ministers that his meeting with Abbas would focus on security issues and the need for the Palestinians to fight terrorism.

Israeli, Qatari officials meet

A meeting between the Israeli and Qatari foreign ministers is being described as a "glimmer of hope" for peace in the Middle East.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who met with his Qatari counterpart in Paris on Wednesday, called the meeting "one important step to bring peace between Israel and the Arab world."

The Qatari foreign minister, Hamad Al Thani, said both Israel and the Palestinians "have to sacrifice to reach a solution."

But the Qatari leader said the Gulf nation is not ready to open diplomatic relations with Israel.

Solana cancels Israel visit

A senior European Union official cancelled a visit to Israel.

The E.U.'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, put off the visit after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said he would not be able to meet with Solana because Solana also planned to hold talks with Yasser Arafat.

Israel says it won't meet with foreign dignitaries who meet with Arafat because of the Palestinian Authority president's alleged involvement in terrorism.

But Sharon did meet this week with the visiting Greek foreign minister, who also met with Arafat on his visit.

elections. Reps. Denise Majette (D-Ga.) and Artur Davis (D-Ala.), the winners in those elections, signed the road map letter to Bush. Majette said her backing of Israel had nothing to do with the financial support she received from the Jewish community.

"We need to support and encourage democracy," she said.

Since the last election cycle, Jewish community leaders have met with their black counterparts to stress the areas of agreement they share. AIPAC has held meetings with 29 members of the CBC to maintain dialogue, according to the group.

While thanking the president for his efforts toward peace in the road map, the AIPAC-backed letter to Bush expresses hope that the president will avoid rigid timelines to "focus instead on real performance" on the two sides' obligations.

The letter reminds Bush of the tough rhetoric he used toward the Palestinians in a policy speech last June 24, when he said the Palestinians would get a state only after they met certain conditions. It doesn't mention Bush's insistence, in the same speech, that Israel pull troops back from much of the West Bank and suspend settlement activity.

Jewish leaders and political experts said AIPAC'S outreach toward black legislators was sincere.

"AIPAC has done its homework," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a group devoted to improving relations between Jews and other ethnic groups. "I'm hearing some very good things, especially from members of the CBC."

"AIPAC has demonstrated greater sensitivity to concerns of the African American community," he said.

One aide to a black caucus member confirmed that they "see the increase in the effort, in terms of the outreach by AIPAC."

The AIPAC dinner, for example, was "big — it was well received," the aide said.

Bositis said outreach efforts by Jewish groups are appreciated now, when minorities are facing stiff resistance on domestic issues they care about. "It's not like African Americans have so many allies that they're looking to lose their allies," he said.

Only 12 of 39 CBC members came to the AIPAC dinner, which was held on a Sunday night, when many lawmakers are in their home districts. Several more came to AIPAC's plenary banquet later that week, an event that drew roughly half of the House of Representatives and Senate, as it usually does.

Among the CBC members who did not sign the road map letter were two members considered AIPAC allies and advocates of black-Jewish cooperation, Reps. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.). Hastings' office did not return calls for comment; an aide to Rangel said that the congressman supported the letter but that there had been an administrative error.

At the same time, Hastings is helping organize a trip to Israel for black and Jewish members of Congress, which would be a first. The trip, spearheaded by Hastings, Howard Berman (D-Calif.), Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Cummings, is tentatively scheduled for this summer.

The trip will explore political issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the fight against terrorism, Hastings aide Fred Turner said.

"One of the equally important parts would be for black and Jewish members to build relationships," he added.

Schneier, whose group is opening a Washington office to improve relations among Jewish and other ethnic caucuses in Congress, said he and Simmons, the rap mogul, also were planning a joint trip to Israel.

One outspoken Palestinian supporter who declined to sign the letter to Bush is Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.).

In 2001, Jackson called Israel's decision to pull out of the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa — in the face of an organized campaign against the Jewish state — "a mistake."

Yet Jackson is planning his first trip to Israel, tentatively slated for August, together with a number of Jewish leaders from his district.

Jackson constituent and supporter Anne Oppenheimer, an AIPAC member and national vice president of the National Council of Jewish Women, said she regretted that Jackson had not signed onto the road map letter.

But she said the trip, and recent discussions with Jackson, proved to her that the congressman and the Jewish community "had come to a better understanding." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Not guilty plea in religious arsons

A not guilty plea was entered on behalf of an Iranian Jew who was charged with a series of arsons on religious buildings in Los Angeles.

Farshid Tehrani was charged Tuesday with 12 counts of arson, terrorism and vandalism for attacks on three synagogues, a Bahai center and a Presbyterian church over a recent two-week period. He is being held on \$750,000 bail, with a preliminary hearing scheduled for May 28.

If convicted on all counts he could face 22 years in prison. Tehrani, 40, came to the United States from Iran 16 years ago.

French Muslim upset over parley

The head of the largest organization on the new Council of French Muslims strongly attacked the council's president for meeting with the Israeli ambassador to France.

On Wednesday, Mohamed Bechari, who heads the Moroccan-backed National Federation of French Muslims, described last week's visit by ambassador Nissim Zvilli to the Grand Mosque, where he met with council head Dalil Boubakeur, as provocative.

"The FNMF supports dialogue with representatives from the Jewish community and is concerned by rising anti-Semitism, as it is by anti-Arab racism. But to receive the Israeli ambassador when the situation in the Middle East is not good constitutes a provocation, in our opinion," Bechari said.

Vigil hopes to end anti-Semitism

Jewish leaders joined other religious leaders at a special prayer service at a Paris synagogue to mark the close of an international conference on anti-Semitism.

The service was held at the Villepinte synagogue, which was fire-bombed in October 2000.

The service marked the end of a three-day conference organized by the Simon Wiesenthal Center at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

Lawmaker upset over ad

A congressman is complaining about a New York Times ad that insinuates that he supports turning eastern Jerusalem over to the Palestinians.

Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) has written a letter of complaint to Rabbi Michael Lerner of Tikkun magazine, whose full-page ad in Wednesday's Times listed Frank among speakers at a Teach-in to Congress planned for next month.

The ad also included a Resolution for Middle East Peace that had the eastern Jerusalem provision, and stated that "both sides have co-created this mess."

The ad states that "not all speakers agree with all the points made in this ad or in this resolution."

Explanations differ for gala snafu: Was it Sharon, or poor ticket sales?

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A gala concert for Israel's 55th birthday has been postponed, just one week before it was to take place — and no one seems to agree why.

Organizers maintain that the concert was delayed from May 19 until December because of a request from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office, not because of poor ticket sales.

But officials at the Israeli Embassy in Washington say they are not aware of any request from Jerusalem or from Daniel Ayalon, Israel's ambassador to Washington, to cancel the program.

Organizers say the event at Washington's MCI Center, which had been in the works for months, was postponed Tuesday because of the sensitive nature of Sharon's meeting the following day with President Bush.

"Organizers were asked by the ambassador to recognize it is a sensitive time and do everything they could to move it," one official familiar with the discussions said. "We cannot have a party while these discussions are going on."

But other sources familiar with the situation say the concert was canceled because of low ticket sales.

"The embassy may have told them not to do it because it would have been embarrassing," one source familiar with the discussions said. "They couldn't have cancelled the event without the embassy approving."

Organizers refused to comment Wednesday, and have repeatedly refused to release information on ticket sales.

"I'm not going to deny or admit to what anyone else said," said Jeanne Ellinport, executive director of the Israel Forever Foundation, which is sponsoring the event.

Many local Jewish leaders are skeptical of the organizers' explanation, noting that many people in Washington had said they weren't planning to attend.

"There had been concern for weeks," one source said. "This thing was just poorly organized from the get-go, and it was a shame."

Sharon is expected to meet Bush at the White House on May 20. The meeting could be tense because of Israel's objections to the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace and U.S. pressure on Israel to move forward on the plan.

Organizers originally said Bush and Sharon might attend the Spirit of Israel concert, but White House officials said last week that the event had never been placed on Bush's calendar.

Sources had said it was unclear whether even Sharon would attend: It would look bad if he skipped the event while he was in town, but his comments at the event could have been blown out of proportion, given his meeting at the White House the following day. But many believe Sharon scheduled his visit to Washington — and his meeting with Bush — precisely so he could attend the concert.

The concert was to have featured comedians Jerry Seinfeld and Ben Stein and singers Tony Bennett, Norah Jones and Tovah Feldshuh.

Organizers said arrangements were being made to determine which performers would or would not be able to attend on Dec. 18, the new date for the concert.

The new date is one day before the first night of Chanukah, and the new concert is being touted as a celebration of the holiday.

Tickets already sold for the May event will be honored in December. Ticket holders also can request a refund, either through Ticketmaster or through the Israel Forever Foundation, which is sponsoring the event. □

Israeli firm fights SARS

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli company is donating breathing devices to help those afflicted with SARS.

Oridion, an Israeli medical device firm, has donated respiratory monitoring devices to hospitals in China, Singapore and Hong Kong, according to Israeli reports. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish groups dismayed after split ruling in Crown Heights trial

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — For many Jewish groups, the tragedy of Yankel Rosenbaum and the black-Jewish violence of Crown Heights that began 12 years ago struck a painfully mixed note this week.

A federal court jury found Lemrick Nelson guilty of violating Rosenbaum's civil rights, but ultimately not responsible for stabbing him to death on Aug. 19, 1991.

The verdict means that Nelson, who had been serving a 19-and-a-half year jail term from a previous 1997 New York state court conviction for violating Rosenbaum's civil rights, faces a maximum of 10 years in prison.

Norman Rosenbaum, Yankel's older brother, praised prosecutors in the case. Outside federal court in Brooklyn, however, he voiced his frustration over the jury's decision and his rage at Nelson.

"One thing I sincerely wish him is that he has a short, painful life," Rosenbaum said, surrounded by reporters.

Still, Rosenbaum added that he feels "relief," since Nelson "could have walked."

Jewish leaders also voiced mixed emotions over the case's climax.

"What's important to know is that Lemrick Nelson is guilty of violating Yankel's civil rights, but we're frustrated because the jury's compromise verdict flies in the face of the evidence presented by the medical examiner at the trial, who said the" knife "wounds led to Yankel's death," said Michael Miller, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, executive director of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York, a group dedicated to fostering ties between Jews and other minorities, said: "I always believed this was a racially motivated attack."

"I don't agree with the sentencing, and believe he should have received the maximum" jail term," Schneier said.

In 1992, Nelson was acquitted of second-degree murder in the case.

Under pressure from the Rosenbaum family and others, however, federal officials brought civil rights charges that led to a 1996 federal court trial.

Nelson fatally stabbed Rosenbaum, 27, after a car in a motorcade ferrying the Lubavitch rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, accidentally struck and killed Gavin Cato, a 7-year-old black child, and injured his cousin, Angela.

Rumors quickly spread throughout the Brooklyn section of Crown Heights, a neighborhood of fervently religious Jews and blacks, that Jewish ambulance workers at the accident scene ignored the children and treated an injured Jewish driver.

Police later said they had ordered the ambulance workers to leave the scene.

But it was too late, and the riots that broke out lasted for days.

The violence rocked already-tense black-Jewish ties in the area, and black-Jewish relations throughout the United States plummeted.

During the latest trial, Nelson admitted for the first time that he

had stabbed Rosenbaum to death. However, he said he didn't target Rosenbaum as a Jew, but because he was drunk after a day of guzzling beer.

That explanation was designed to defend Nelson, who could have faced a life sentence if he were found responsible for Rosenbaum's murder.

Nelson's defense team also tried to blunt charges of responsibility by claiming that Nelson was swept up in a violent crowd that hunted Rosenbaum down, chanting "get the Jew" and "kill the Jew."

While Jewish leaders greeted the verdict with ambivalence and disappointment, they also said black-Jewish relations have improved since 1991.

"We must also view this verdict and the other two trials as benchmarks in the continuing strengthening of black-Jewish relations," Schneier said.

Black-Jewish relations have warmed locally and nationally, these Jewish leaders said.

Miller, for example, pointed out that Carmel Cato, Gavin Cato's father, sat with Norman Rosenbaum during this latest trial in the case.

That image "is a living example of the change in Crown Heights over the past 12 years," he said.

Jewish leaders in the neighborhood have echoed that state of affairs, saying that while the communities don't always see eye to eye, there is an ongoing dialogue and new outbursts of violence are unlikely.

Miller, meanwhile, says blacks and Jews in the New York area now work together on "quality-of-life" issues such as health care, while Schneier said new political alliances have developed at the national level.

Other Jewish groups voiced dismay at the ruling.

"While we are gratified that the jury found Lemrick Nelson liable for violating the civil rights" of Rosenbaum, "we are saddened and disappointed by this compromise verdict that did not recognize what the evidence in the case sustained; that Mr. Nelson's actions led to Mr. Rosenbaum's death," said the Anti-Defamation League's regional chairman, Marin Karlinsky, and regional director, Joel Levy, in a prepared statement.

American Jewish Committee spokesman Kenneth Bandler said he was "gratified" by the civil-rights conviction, but "sorely disappointed" that Nelson ultimately was not found responsible for the death.

At this trial Nelson "decided, for tactical reasons, to admit his culpability. That delayed admission makes the jury's failure to find that Nelson's actions were a proximate cause of Rosenbaum's death even more disheartening," Bandler said.

The American Jewish Congress echoed that sentiment, calling the ruling "only a small measure of justice."

The Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs said "Nelson clearly murdered Yankel Rosenbaum in an act of racism and anti-Semitism."

The presiding justice in the case, U.S. District Court Judge Frederic Block, is expected to hand down a sentence soon.

One observer of the case said prosecutors could ask for the judge to extend the recommended 10-year term, even as Nelson's defense team predicted that he could be freed within about one year.

Prosecutors could also appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. □