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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Fence compromise possible?

Israel may be willing to compromise on the route of its planned security fence.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made the comments Sunday at the weekly Cabinet meeting, Ha'aretz reported.

Meanwhile, Sharon told Cabinet ministers he is planning to take some "unilateral steps" to help ease the conflict, but did not specify what those steps would be.

Channel 2 has reported that Sharon was planning to dismantle some settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by the summer of 2004 and transfer their residents to new communities in the Negev Desert.

Congress passes Syria bill

Congress overwhelmingly passed a bill imposing penalties on Syria unless it takes action against terrorists under its control.

The House of Representatives voted 408-8 on Nov. 20 to approve Senate modifications to a bill the House passed in October. President Bush is expected to sign the bill before December. The Senate version gives the president the right to waive the sanctions every six months, allowing the administration the flexibility it demanded as a condition for not opposing the bill.

If Syria does not end support for terrorism, end its occupation of Lebanon and stop producing weapons of mass destruction, the president can impose sanctions including a ban on the export of materials that could be used for weapons manufacture and restrictions on the movement of Syrian officials and planes.

Jerusalem wall murders

Palestinian gunmen killed two Israelis guarding the construction site for a security wall outside Jerusalem. Saturday night's attack in the village of Abu Dis, just outside Jerusalem, might have been prevented were security regulations followed, police said. Three other guards in the crew were absent, and the site did not have proper lighting.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, in which the guards' guns were stolen.

Residents of Abu Dis have been outraged by Israel's planned security fence, which divides their community.

Steinhardt education proposal steals show at General Assembly

By Rachel Pomerance

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Imagine a world in which every newborn child receives a voucher toward early childhood Jewish education and a free trip to Israel.

That's what philanthropist Michael Steinhardt asked 4,000 delegates to the North American Jewish federation system's General Assembly to consider Nov. 19.

The "Newborn Gift" would be part of an overall investment in strengthening Jewish education that Steinhardt is proposing. He told delegates that he was willing to contribute \$10 million to the project, which he called the Fund for Our Jewish Future — on condition that his contribution represent no more than 10 percent of the total fund. In other words, the former Wall Street tycoon was challenging the audience to raise at least \$90 million for Jewish education in the Diaspora.

Many in the room found Steinhardt's speech groundbreaking — and highly relevant.

Chip Koplin of Macon, Ga., said the speech gave him the chills. Koplin said that of all his experiences at this year's General Assembly — his first time in Israel — Steinhardt's speech "is going to have the most profound effect on me."

"As an American challenged with the struggles of a small, Southern Jewish community" trying to sustain Jewish identity, Koplin said he could relate to the speech.

The speech came as federations struggle to fund their local and overseas needs amid flat campaigns. Still, federation leaders didn't appear to worry that Steinhardt's appeal would undermine their own efforts.

"He made the speech to a convention of North American federations, so clearly he is looking" to partner with them, said Jacob Solomon, executive vice president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. In fact, the federation system encourages such visionary ideas, Solomon said.

Steinhardt said the proposal is a response to decreasing Jewish identification among non-Orthodox Diaspora Jews.

Steinhardt mustered a litany of statistics to prove his point. Some 49 percent of American Jews identify as secular; only 20 percent give to Jewish causes, down from the post-World War II period when half the community gave to Jewish causes; and the number of American Jews is dwindling, according to the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey, Steinhardt said.

"This part of the Diaspora community — its majority — is in crisis," Steinhardt said. While most Jewish activists focus on threats to Israel, in some respects the Diaspora is "far more vulnerable," he said.

"We don't know enough about our religion to take true pride in it. We remain Jewish on the vapors of cultural memory," Steinhardt said.

He also bemoaned what he called a glaring lack of Jewish leadership and innovative ideas. By contrast, he pointed to the birthright Israel program, which offers free trips to 18- to 26-year-olds who have never been on a peer trip to Israel. Steinhardt is one of the program's major funders.

"Birthright has been nothing less than a transformation in Jewish life," he said. However, "the future of the program is tenuous — not because there are no young people who want to partake of this venture," but "simply because there's not enough money to pay for them."

While the federation system raised hundreds of millions of dollars for its Israel Emergency Campaign, it has difficulty raising "a fraction of that amount" for birthright,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Politics stopped study's release

A study on anti-Semitism in Europe was not released, reportedly because of political concerns. The study commissioned by the European Union was reportedly shelved early this year because it found that Muslims, as well as right-wing extremists, were mainly responsible for anti-Semitic incidents committed during May and June 2002, British news reports said. In addition, there may have been problems in separating anti-Israel activity from anti-Semitism.

A spokesman for the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia said the findings would be included in a larger study to be done next year.

Clark with Shin Bet chiefs

Wesley Clark agrees with top Israeli security officials who say Israel must do more politically to draw the Palestinians into peace talks.

The Democratic candidate for president said it is up to the Palestinians to initiate a return to peace talks by ending terrorism, but he agreed with the Israeli army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, and four former heads of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence service, who suggested recently that Israel's government relies too much on force.

"They've concluded that military measures alone will not provide security for Israel," the former NATO chief told the Council on Foreign Relations last week. "I agree." Clark reserved his toughest criticism for the Bush administration, which he said had neglected the issue.

What's in a name?

Daniel, Noa and Mohammed were the most popular Israeli names in 2002. Among girls, Noa was followed by Shira, Maya, Adi and Yael.

Daniel was followed by Itai, David, Noam and Ido. Among Israel's Muslims, Mohammed led the way for boys, and Aya among girls.



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Steinhardt said. He called for a "Jewish renaissance for our young people." He said his agenda would focus on the "centrality of Israel for the Jewish soul," the "pre-eminence of Jewish peoplehood," encouragement of vibrant rabbis, the principle of charity and the "imperative of a Jewish education."

"Our survival depends on the next generation being educated," Steinhardt said.

The audience, which buzzed with electrified chatter after the speech, seemed to feel the same way. Many rushed the stage to shake Steinhardt's hand.

Passing out fliers outside the auditorium, Jewish students said they would raise \$500,000 for Steinhardt's proposed fund.

Federation leaders largely praised the initiative but noted that the challenge is significant. They rejected the idea that the appeal might undermine their own fund-raising efforts.

Robert Schray, vice chairman of the United Jewish Communities, the federation umbrella organization, sounded a note of optimism.

"Can he do it? Yeah, I think there's a large amount of money available in the American Jewish community for a cause like this," Schray said.

John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of the UJA-Federation of New York, praised the effort but took a wait-and-see approach.

"We need to have more details" on what such a plan would entail before commenting on its chances for success, Ruskay said.

As far as Steinhardt is concerned, the project is an imperative.

"The Jewish future of our children" is at stake, he said. "We owe our children nothing less." □

Extradition papers presented for accused Nazi helper in Costa Rica

By Brian Harris

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (JTA) — After years of effort, extradition papers have been presented for an accused Nazi collaborator living in Costa Rica.

Poland's ambassador to Costa Rica, Richard Sthneps, formally presented Costa Rican Foreign Minister Enrique Tovar with extradition papers recently for Bohdan Koziy, a Ukrainian who has lived in Costa Rica since 1987.

Koziy was indicted earlier this month by a court in Katowice, Poland, at the request of prosecutor Ewa Koj of Warsaw's Institute of National Memory on charges that as a Nazi collaborator he killed 15 people.

Sthneps told JTA he couldn't say how long the extradition process would take.

"I count on the goodwill of the Costa Rican authorities," he said.

Costa Rican security officials have confided privately to the local Jewish community and to diplomats interested in the case that they know where to find Koziy, and had been awaiting the extradition request to detain him.

Attorneys in the local Jewish community of roughly 2,500 people, most of whom are of Polish descent, believe the extradition procedure should take no more than two months because the country stripped Koziy of his legal standing in 2000.

Unless a bilateral treaty exists to expedite the process, extradition procedures from Costa Rica can take years.

That's one of the reasons Costa Rica long has been a favored destination of swindlers and crooks on the lam.

However, the decision to expel Koziy has been upheld by the country's highest court, clearing the way for the extradition to proceed swiftly. However, Koziy is expected to seek some delays in the process, potentially arguing ill health as a justification, attorneys said.

Observers in the Jewish community who monitor Koziy's movements say he has been in and out of private medical clinics and hospitals this year.

Koziy has rejected the charges against him in the past, but he currently refuses to discuss his case publicly. He is believed to be the only accused war criminal to have made his way to Costa Rica, a country that declared war on Nazi Germany a day before the United States did, and which long has been an ally of Israel. □

JEWISH WORLD

House Dems target Saudis

Democrats in the House of Representatives introduced a bill threatening sanctions against Saudi Arabia unless it cracks down on terrorism.

Passage of the bill is unlikely because Republicans in both houses have quashed bills targeting Saudi Arabia in the recent past. The House bill, introduced last Friday by Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), is based on a similar bill against Syria.

Private Shabbat in Istanbul

Shabbat services were held at private locations in Istanbul. The precautions were taken because of last Saturday's suicide bombings at two Istanbul synagogues.

Meanwhile, several thousand people rallied in Istanbul to protest recent terror attacks, which included four blasts that killed some 50 people.

Interfaith rallies for peace

Jews, Muslims and Christians attended an interfaith ceremony in Berlin to mark the recent bombings in Istanbul. Under tight security at last Friday's rally at the Centrum Judaicum, representatives of the Israeli, American, British and Turkish embassies, as well as leaders of Germany's Jewish and Turkish communities, called for greater interfaith cooperation and courage and resolve against terrorism.

Jewish Dems demand apology

Jewish Democrats want a pro-Republican Web site to apologize for posting an anti-Semitic article.

The article by James Hall, posted Nov. 17 on GOPUSA.com, compares George Soros, a Jewish pro-Democratic financier, to Satan, calls him a "Hungarian-born descendant of Shylock" and says former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad "was just stating the truth" when he said Jews rule the world.

GOPUSA, which is not formally affiliated with the Republican Party, pulled the article within a day.

Interfaith talks reconsidered

A leading activist and Orthodox rabbi is urging a lifting of the longtime ban on theological discussions between Christians and Jews.

Eugene Korn challenged a 1964 edict by the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, whom many consider the spiritual father of modern Orthodoxy, that said interfaith talks with Christians could address only political, social and moral issues, not theological ones.

Korn told the Forward that given the Catholic Church's moves since 1964 — such as dropping the charge that Jews for all time are responsible for Jesus' death, and its efforts to combat anti-Semitism — "carefully defined" religious discussions could occur.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Bad news for Russian oil firm may mean bad times for philanthropy

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The effects of the Kremlin's crackdown on the oil giant Yukos are dripping down to Russia's Jews.

Russian Jewish philanthropist Leonid Nevzlin, who has ties to the embattled oil giant Yukos, will cut funding to his central Jewish project in Russia, Nevzlin's aide told JTA. A former president of the Russian Jewish Congress, Nevzlin will make the decision as a protest against government pressure on him and the company, Mikhail Yastrubitsky said.

The move would be the latest fallout from the Kremlin crackdown on Yukos and its former director, Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Khodorkovsky, Russia's wealthiest man, was arrested Oct. 25 and is being held in a Moscow prison awaiting trial on a number of counts, including tax evasion and mass theft of state property in privatization schemes.

Nevzlin, who had been Khodorkovsky's deputy, left Russia for Israel in early September amid mounting pressure on the company's leadership. He became an Israeli citizen in early November.

Before he left for Israel, Nevzlin, 44, had emerged as one of the largest domestic sponsors of Jewish life in Russia.

A former member of the upper house of Russia's Parliament, Nevzlin abandoned his business and political careers earlier this year and invested significant sums in various Jewish projects. Among them were the creation of centers for academic research on Russian Jewry in Moscow and at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

He may now cut all or most of his funding for the Moscow-based International Center for Russian and East European Jewish Studies, as well as for other Russia-based Jewish programs, Yastrubitsky said in a telephone interview from Tel Aviv last Friday.

The Moscow-based center was launched with Nevzlin's funds less than three months ago. "He doesn't find it necessary to cooperate with the authorities whose policy he is not supporting," Yastrubitsky said. "In the next two to three weeks, he will make his decision as to what and how he is going to fund in the future."

Nevzlin's contribution to Jewish projects in Russia and Israel is estimated at \$2 million to \$2.5 million per year. Yastrubitsky said Nevzlin is likely to continue at least part of his contributions to several Russian projects, including his annual donation to a Moscow JCC of which Nevzlin is chairman of the board.

Russian Jewish academics say they understand Nevzlin's motivation but regret his decision.

"In the few months since it was started, Nevzlin's center was able to create a big difference for those doing Jewish research in Russia," said Viktoria Mochalova, director of the Sefer Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization, a Moscow-based umbrella organization for Jewish studies programs at universities across the former Soviet Union.

Oleg Budnitsky, academic director of the International Center for Russian and East European Jewish Studies, said his organization gave \$100,000 in grants to Jewish studies scholars and university students. "It is obvious that the scope of our activities will not be the same as it was originally planned," he said.

Also, Nevzlin resigned from his post as rector at the Russian State University for the Humanities. He said the Russian government pressed the school board to dismiss him and threatened to reorganize the school if the board failed to get rid of him.

The school was the first in the Soviet Union to open a full-time academic Jewish studies program back in 1991.

The program, launched in cooperation with the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, is still among Russia's leading programs of Jewish studies, offering master's degrees in Jewish and biblical studies.

At the same time, Nevzlin will continue supporting his Israel-based projects, focused around Hebrew University. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

As Jewish 'travel advisory' issued, Greece tries to curb anti-Semitism

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS (JTA) — Greece has introduced a new law to crack down on racism and anti-Semitism following charges that the country's media and government have fostered a climate that engenders anti-Semitism.

Greeks found guilty of discriminating against religious or ethnic groups would face up to a year in prison under legislation presented last week by the Greek government following a rise in racist and anti-Semitic incidents.

The legislation is expected to come up for a vote before the end of the year.

"The law will help reduce anti-Semitic incidents in Greece," said Moïssis Costantini, president of the Central Jewish Board of Greece, an umbrella organization representing Greek Jews.

"We are in touch with the government and, before the legislation is voted into law, we will suggest any amendments if needed," Costantini said.

Aside from cemetery desecrations, Greece hasn't seen the type of serious anti-Semitic acts — such as physical attacks on Jews — that have occurred in some parts of Europe since the Palestinian intifada began three years ago.

However, the media and intelligentsia have been fiercely anti-Israel, and some critics say they often cross the line into outright anti-Semitism.

One prominent composer, for example, recently caused a stir with a speech in which he proclaimed, in front of government officials, that Jews are "the root of all evil."

In addition, many critics charged that a recent exhibit at an Athens art gallery glorified Palestinian suicide bombers. The exhibit featured an embroidery montage showing an Arab woman in a bomb belt destroying an Israeli supermarket.

The stakes escalated late last week when Greece announced that it would establish a national day of remembrance for Greek Jews who died in the Holocaust.

The country's Interior Ministry said it would submit legislation to Parliament making Jan. 27 — the day prisoners were liberated from Auschwitz — a "Day of Remembrance of Greek Jewish Holocaust Victims."

More than 90 percent of Greece's 80,000 Jews perished in Nazi death camps or during the German occupation of Greece in World War II.

Last Friday's announcement came a day after the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center issued a travel advisory urging Jews to avoid visiting Greece for the 2004 Olympics because of the alleged anti-Semitic climate.

"Failing a dramatic change in attitude and policy, the current atmosphere of hate and vilification can only escalate and could also poison the environment leading up to the 2004 Olympic Games," the center's associate dean, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, said in the statement.

The Greek and Israeli governments and the Greek Jewish community harshly denounced the advisory.

"The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a private organization and does not represent the Government of Israel," the Israeli Embassy in Athens said in a statement.

Israel "maintains excellent and friendly relations" with Greece, the statement continued.

The Jewish Board issued a statement saying that it "disagrees completely and expresses its sorrow regarding the 'travel advisory.'"

The group said the advisory was based on "isolated incidents" of anti-Semitism "and creates an impression that is far from reality."

Foreign Minister George Papandreou and the deputy interior minister, Nikos Bistis, have been driving the effort to rid Greece of its growing image as an anti-Semitic country.

Two weeks ago, the Jewish Board met with Bistis to discuss creating the national Holocaust remembrance day.

Greece is the only European country that does not have a day of Holocaust remembrance, the group told Bistis.

Both Bistis and Greece's minister of culture, Vangelis Venizelos, promised a Greek Holocaust day.

This is not the first time Bistis has come to the assistance of Greek Jews. He has been prominent in condemning anti-Semitic incidents, even when other members of the government have hesitated.

The most recent example was after the recent twin synagogue bombings in Istanbul.

"This is what happens when the entire Jewish people is being indiscriminately blamed," Bistis said.

After composer Mikis Theodorakis called Jews "the root of all evil," the reactions of Israel and world Jewry stirred the Greek government to action.

Papandreou wrote to his counterpart in Israel, Silvan Shalom, asking for help in building a coalition of Greek Jews, Greek non-Jews and Jews worldwide to fight anti-Semitism in Greece.

Papandreou also sent a letter to the World Jewish Congress saying that if there is a resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe, then Europe must tackle the problem actively.

"Attempts at moral relativism achieve little more than reinforcing anti-Semitism today and diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust," he wrote.

Papandreou called the recent synagogue bombings in Istanbul "horrifying," saying they constituted "not only an attack on the Jewry of Istanbul; it symbolizes an attack on every innocent citizen in the world."

Meanwhile, Bistis talked to members of Greece's Parliament to line up support for the crackdown on anti-Semitism. □

Security upped for British Jews

LONDON (JTA) — Under advice from police, the security level at British Jewish communal institutions has been raised to its highest state of alert.

The Community Security Trust, the United Kingdom's official Jewish security organization, took the decision in the wake of recent bombings of Jewish and British targets in Istanbul, and after a number of high-level meetings with police.

In the past decade, the Jewish community has been at the top level of alert only after the Israeli Embassy in London was bombed in 1996 and after a spate of nail bombings in the capital in 1999.

"The psychology of terror today is more sophisticated than we have seen," a Security Trust spokesman said. "We have repeated time and time again that there is a specific threat to Jewish communities both here and abroad." □