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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Burns meets Israelis, Palestinians

A senior U.S. State Department official is meeting with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. William Burns, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, met with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei on Saturday and is scheduled to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Sunday.

Following his meeting with Qurei in Amman, a statement from the U.S. Embassy was released reiterating the White House's commitment to a two-state solution and noting a call by Burns in the meeting for Palestinians to crack down on terrorism and violence.

Palestinian terrorists sentenced

Two Palestinians were sentenced to 36 consecutive life terms for their involvement in several suicide bombings.

On Sunday, an Israeli military court sentenced Muhammad Arman and Walid Anjaf for their roles in a bombing in Rishon le-Zion, which killed 15, the Cafe Moment attack in Jerusalem, which killed 11, and the Hebrew University bombing in Jerusalem that killed nine people. During the reading of the verdict, one of the men yelled out, "What we did was not murder, and we are not sorry for it. This is our struggle against the occupation."

Omri Sharon meets Palestinians

Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials recently held closed-door meetings outside of London.

The discussions held for two days late last week included key confidants of the leaders on both sides, such as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's son Omri and Yasser Arafat's security adviser, Jibril Rajoub.

Omri Sharon has served as his father's envoy in the past. The meeting came as preparations continued to lay the groundwork for discussions between Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei.

Arrest in Turkey shul bombings

Turkey arrested a man believed to have given the orders in one of the Turkish synagogue bombings.

The suspect, whose name was not released, is believed to be behind the attack on the Beth Israel synagogue, one of two deadly attacks on Nov. 15. He was charged Saturday with treason, which is punishable by life in prison.

AMERICA DECIDES 2004

For Lieberman, Jewishness key but it doesn't tell the whole story

By Matthew E. Berger

CONCORD, N.H. (JTA) — When Joseph Lieberman was 10 years old, bouncing a basketball through the house, the family rabbi told his mother, "He will never amount to anything."

"I laughed at him," Marcia Lieberman recalls. "What would you say to your rabbi who said that?"

On the day Sen. Joseph Lieberman officially submitted his name for the Democratic primary ballot in New Hampshire, his 89-year-old mother was the center of attention, holding court across the street at a small pub and telling stories that would make any son blush.

The presence of a stereotypical Jewish mother on the campaign trail is perhaps the most Jewish aspect of a campaign that is trying to downplay the candidate's religion.

Lieberman's Jewishness has made headlines since he was selected as Al Gore's vice presidential running mate on the Democratic ticket in 2000, and now that Lieberman is running for the top job himself, defining the role his heritage plays has become a challenge for the candidate.

"I'm running for president as an American who happens to be Jewish, not the other way around," Lieberman says, talking with JTA as he is driven from Concord to Manchester for a house party. "I'm proud of my heritage, but I am absolutely confident that the American people are ready to choose whoever they think is the best candidate for president, regardless of religion, nationality, race, gender, etc."

The candidate grows visibly upset as he is peppered with questions about his religion and its impact on his campaign, and he jokingly threatens to strangle the interviewer if the topic doesn't change.

The frustration is understandable.

Lieberman's campaign is, after all, about a lot more than being Jewish. A car in his motorcade bears a Jesus fish just below a sticker saying "Joe Lieberman 2004." And pepperoni pizza will be served that evening at the home of a Greek American state representative who has endorsed Lieberman.

But in many ways, it is Lieberman's Judaism — or, more specifically, his devout beliefs and actions — that has helped the senator emerge as more than just one of the 100 members of the Senate, positioning him for his current bid for the White House.

Lieberman's refusal to drive on Shabbat led Gore, then a senator, to offer a bedroom in his Capitol Hill home to Lieberman for Friday nights and weekends when the Senate was in session, sparking a friendship partly responsible for Lieberman's selection as Gore's running mate in 2000.

And it was his faith, and the milestone of becoming the first Jew on a national party ticket, that helped give him celebrity status on the campaign trail in 2000, winning him a following that no unsuccessful vice presidential candidate has gotten since Geraldine Ferraro broke the gender barrier in 1984.

Lieberman's faith has also gotten him into some trouble.

Some Jewish groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, publicly rebuked Lieberman's talk of his faith on the campaign trail. Lieberman's complaints about violence in the media, in which he joined with former Education Secretary William Bennett, cost him support and fund-raising dollars in Hollywood.

Lieberman makes no apologies for who he is, and he notes that the last two

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon may annex in West Bank

Ariel Sharon may unilaterally annex some West Bank Jewish settlements, an Israeli newspaper reported. Ma'ariv reported last Friday that the Israeli prime minister also might dismantle Gaza settlements. Settlements under consideration for annexation included Ma'aleh Adumim, east of Jerusalem, and the Etzion bloc, south of Jerusalem.

Annan blasts fence

Kofi Annan says Israel's security barrier could damage prospects for peace. The U.N. Secretary General was reporting on Israel's compliance with a General Assembly resolution that demanded the barrier be dismantled. Routing the wall through parts of the West Bank, instead of alongside it, "could damage the longer-term prospects for peace," Annan said in the report released last Friday.

Palestinian negotiator fired upon

Gunmen shot at the home of a Palestinian architect of the unofficial "Geneva accord," but no injuries were reported. Several bullets were shot into the house of Yasser Abed Rabbo in the early hours of Saturday morning in the West Bank city of al-Bireh, next to Ramallah, Palestinian security sources said. The former Palestinian minister of information headed the Palestinian team that drafted the accord along with a group of Israelis. The accord is slated to be launched Monday.

Troops kill Palestinian by mistake

Israeli troops shot and killed a Palestinian policeman in error outside a Gaza Strip settlement.

The Israeli army said the man killed last Friday was among a crowd of 40 Palestinians gathered outside the settlement of Nissanit and was mistakenly fired upon by soldiers. The army has apologized and suspended those soldiers involved in the shooting.



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Democrats to win the presidency — Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton — were men who felt comfortable speaking about their faith in a broad, inclusive way.

And when it is advantageous, Lieberman wears his religion on his sleeve.

Appearing in October at a Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., synagogue located in a senior citizen's center, Lieberman spoke Yiddish and accepted a lulav for Sukkot. But he remains defiant that he is not the "Jewish candidate" — even if his Concord office is on top of a bagel shop — and that religion will not be a factor in the voting booth.

Lieberman says he is disappointed that more Jews are not supporting his candidacy, the way other minority groups have rallied around their candidates in the past.

But he says he knows that the American Jewish community is diverse.

"If somebody in the Jewish community thinks that one of the other Democratic candidates will make a better president than I, or that George Bush will make a better president than I, then they should, notwithstanding the fact that I am Jewish, support those other candidates," he says. "But what I have said is: Don't not support me because I'm Jewish, because that is anti-Semitism."

Lieberman says his sluggish showing in the New Hampshire polls — the latest American Research Group survey has him running a distant fourth with 5 percent of the vote — is irrelevant, because other polls show him having one of the best chances at beating President Bush in the general election.

And he is expending a lot of time and energy in New Hampshire, bypassing the Iowa caucus, hoping to succeed in the first state primary on Jan. 27.

Outside analysts say that Lieberman's religion probably isn't that big a factor in this race, and that his poor showing is based more significantly on his conservatism relative to the other candidates.

"It's not that I don't think there are bigots anywhere in America, it's just that I know we're in a country that is so pervasively accepting and tolerant, that they don't speak out publicly very much," Lieberman says.

"I remain totally confident that America is ready to vote for a Jewish candidate for president if they think he or she is best suited to be the president they need."

Joseph Isadore Lieberman was born on Feb. 24, 1942, in Stamford, Conn., and grew up in one of the most religiously observant Jewish families in the area.

One of his mother's earliest memories of Joe is tying her 2-year-old to a banister outside of the house so he could play outside without supervision.

"Now I would be called an abusive mother," she says.

The fact that the Liebermans did things differently — keeping kosher and observing Shabbat in a place with few observant Jews — taught Joe discipline, his mother says.

"Now she tells me," Lieberman says when told of his mother's analysis. "Well, she's probably right. There's no question that a part of what shaped me is that I grew up in a largely non-Jewish community in which I was religiously observant."

"There are certain things you miss on Friday night or Saturday but you do it for a reason," he says.

On the campaign trail, too, Lieberman has missed some political events because of his religious observance. One Democratic presidential debate in Arizona was rescheduled because it conflicted with Lieberman's observance of Sukkot.

Through his career, Lieberman has learned to walk the line between religious observance and public life. The first two times he was nominated for the Senate by the Democratic Party in Connecticut, it was done on a Friday night. Lieberman accepted the nomination by videotape.

"The Democrats in Connecticut understood what was going on," says Bill Andresen, who spent 10 years as Lieberman's chief of staff on Capital Hill.

And most people in Washington know it now as well.

Lieberman says he'll vote in the Senate and fulfill his job requirements on the Sabbath, but not campaign or raise funds. He says he welcomes the question of what he would do as president on the Sabbath, understanding it is important that voters know he will take calls from heads of state and military leaders as the nation's chief executive.

Lieberman's high school yearbook reads like an overachiever's dream. He was not only class president and the most popular kid at school, but he also created a summer school after he graduated so that some of his classmates who had missed credits could get a diploma. Lieberman talked his friends into becoming tutors.

The same rabbi who said he wouldn't amount to anything at the age of 10 tried,

JEWISH WORLD

Kenya drops murder charges

Kenyan prosecutors dropped murder charges against five men in an attack on an Israeli-owned hotel last November that killed 12 people.

Four other men who still are charged with the murder in the suicide bomb attack in the resort town of Mombasa will go on trial beginning Jan. 26.

Three Israelis and nine Kenyans died in the attack, the same day two terrorist missiles narrowly missed an Israeli passenger plane leaving Kenya for Israel.

Three of the five men who had murder charges dropped last Friday still face trial for other crimes connected to Al-Qaida.

One of those crimes was a foiled attempt to blow up the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi.

London synagogue attacked

A London synagogue had its windows broken in what police are describing as a hate crime.

The Orthodox Edgware Synagogue was attacked with bricks after congregants left at the end of Shabbat on Saturday.

It is the second time this year the shul has been targeted.

Camp guard trial delayed

The trial of a man accused by the U.S. government of lying about his activities during World War II was delayed.

Ildefonsas Bucmys, a Lithuanian native now living in Ohio, is accused of failing to disclose that he served at the Majdanek death camp when he applied for American citizenship in 1992.

The trial of the 82-year-old Bucmys, which could lead to his deportation to Lithuania, is now set to begin on March 29.

The judge in the case is currently considering motions filed by Bucmys and by the Office of Special Investigations, the Department of Justice's Nazi-hunting unit.

Complaint against Hillel rabbi

A complaint was filed in a Los Angeles court against a UCLA Hillel rabbi and Hillel.

The complaint filed Nov. 20 alleges that Chaim Seidler-Feller assaulted Rachel Neuwirth following a campus talk by Alan Dershowitz on Oct. 21.

The complaint also charges that Hillel has failed to investigate Seidler-Feller's "bizarre" and "violent" behavior in the past.

An attorney for Seidler-Feller called the rendering of the Oct. 21 event a mischaracterization and said the allegations of past behavior were untrue.

A representative for the UCLA Hillel said the case is being reviewed.

when Lieberman was 14, to convince the young man to become a rabbi.

"He had all the elements that would make him a good community leader," said Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, now executive director at the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. "The fact that he took that higher, to the Senate, only concludes in my mind that I was right."

Lieberman felt he could fulfill his religious mission better on a soapbox rather than a synagogue bimah, friends and family say.

Ehrenkranz says Lieberman understood that the Ten Commandments had two sides, one dedicated to serving God, the other to the betterment of man.

Lieberman concurs. "There's no question that one of the motivating factors was my religious upbringing and the basic understanding that my life was a gift from God and I had a responsibility to give back by — stated in its simplest form — doing tikkun olam, by working to improve the world," he says.

The Washington bug first bit him in 1963, he says, when he interned for a man very much like himself, Abraham Ribicoff, a Jew from Connecticut who became governor in 1955 and won a Senate seat in 1962.

"There's no question that that experience had a real effect on me," Lieberman says of his summer in Washington, in which he heard Martin Luther King Jr. give his "I Have a Dream" speech. He later brought students from his Yale University class to Mississippi to help register blacks to vote.

Lieberman says of Ribicoff, "He stood for independence, integrity. He got things done within Washington." He adds, "It's funny as I say these words how much I hope they're words that people identify with me today."

Ribicoff was a guide for Lieberman not just on how to be a Jew in the Senate, but that one could get to the Senate as a Jew.

"He learned you could be a Jew and you could serve," Ehrenkranz says. "He saw that our own electorate would discard beliefs of a person and turn to the best man."

Armed with that understanding, Lieberman ran for and was elected to the Connecticut Senate, where he rose to majority leader. After a failed run for Congress and a divorce from his first wife, Betty Haas, Lieberman became the state's attorney general.

He now says that in this age of terrorism, "America needs a president that has a bit of attorney general in him."

His presidential campaign has earned endorsements from four current state attorneys general, in Colorado, Oklahoma, Iowa and Connecticut.

In 1988, Lieberman defeated incumbent Lowell Weicker to win a Senate seat. There, Lieberman quickly developed a reputation as a freethinker, one who could easily cross party lines. He also quickly became known as the observant Jew in the chamber.

"The life we chose to live is hard, but his is harder," said Michael Lewan, Lieberman's first chief of staff. "He never made it an issue."

Lieberman quietly ate salad or fish in the Senate dining room and at hundreds of receptions where other lawmakers dined on steak. Gore would refer to himself as Lieberman's "Shabbos goy," Andresen said.

And when it came to policy positions, Lieberman consulted Connecticut voters, not rabbis or Jewish law.

"I don't go to the rabbi for guidance as to how to vote," he says. "But it's the sense of justice and responsibility, that we're taught we have to pursue justice, to pursue mercy and righteousness. It's all part of me and I'm sure part of the decisions I make."

The decisions he has made throughout his public life place him on the conservative side of the 2004 Democratic primary field.

At a recent AARP forum in New Hampshire, five of six candidates bashed the new Republican prescription drug plan, while Lieberman said he needed to do more research before making a decision. A week later, he also announced his opposition to the plan.

But if his policies didn't win him support in the senior citizen circuit, at least his mother did. The senator introduced her at the beginning of the debate and referenced her often, a standard element of his stump speech.

Even the other candidates there noted her impact. Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) told the AARP audience that Mrs. Lieberman had endorsed his own health care plan.

By the end of the day, the Lieberman campaign had published a statement by Mrs. Lieberman. Edwards is "a nice looking boy," Mrs. Lieberman said, but Joe's health plan was best. □

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION**Jews looking to liberals
as Russians prepare to vote***By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Jewish banking executive running with a political party that has an open anti-Semite at the top of its electoral list.

A Jewish oil tycoon who bankrolled campaigns of the largest opposition parties awaiting a trial on economic charges in a Moscow prison.

Friends of former President Boris Yeltsin's bodyguard, known for his anti-Jewish remarks, frantically courting Russian Israelis who have the right to vote in the Russian elections. These are some of the pieces of the puzzle known as the Russian parliamentary campaign that will be put together in the Dec. 7 vote.

While 23 parties are in the race for the State Duma, as Russia's lower house is known, only five or six of the parties have a viable chance of crossing the 5 percent threshold needed to win parliamentary seats, recent polls say.

According to Russian electoral law, half of the seats in the 450-member Duma are distributed proportionally to those party lists that capture more than 5 percent of the vote. The other 225 seats go to the winners of direct votes in single-seat districts.

More than 4,500 candidates are registered to run for the Duma.

The number includes some Jews, and if history is any indication, voters will not hesitate to support them — about a dozen Jews were elected in single-mandate districts in the previous election four years ago.

Where are Jewish voters in this election?

Most observers agree that, as in previous post-Communist elections, most Jews are likely to support one of the two major liberal opposition parties — both of whose electoral prospects hover around the 5 percent threshold.

Russian Jewish voters "have always differed from the average national vote. Jewish voters have a traditional liking for liberals," said Alexander Osovtsyov, a Jewish former member of the first post-Communist Duma who is listed on the party slate of Yabloko, one of the two major liberal parties. SPS is the other.

Jewish votes account for a tiny fraction of the national total — there are likely no more than 500,000 identified Jews in this country of roughly 145 million.

Observers agree that the only party outside of the liberal camp that can count on some visible Jewish support — especially from older Jews — is the United Russia Party, which backs Russian President Vladimir Putin. Recent polls predicted this party would receive between one-quarter and one-third of the national vote.

Parties generally do not court Jewish votes, and the organized Jewish community is not supporting any particular party.

In southern Russia's Volgograd region, all but one of the local Jewish organizations have recently signed an agreement urging all of the signatories not to support any of the candidates in the Duma race to "avoid the involvement in politicized campaign often carrying a provocative nature."

But the Jewish leaders in the central city of Tula have faced pressure from a host of local Duma hopefuls.

Despite protests from the local branch of the Communist Party, Russia's Central Election Committee assigned all of the

Russian citizens living in Israel to the Tula electoral district, known as a Communist stronghold.

About 100,000 Russian voters in Israel have the right to vote in the Duma elections.

Votes cast in the Jewish state may play a decisive role in the race for a seat from Tula, as Israeli votes account for almost one-fourth of all voters registered in the district.

"They keep coming to us asking for support," Faina Sanevich, a Jewish leader in Tula, said of some of the candidates in the local race. "I'm trying not to get into this at all, though I cannot do anything if some of our Jews volunteer to help in the campaigns."

Sanevich said a prominent board member of her community recently left for Israel to campaign on behalf of Alexander Korzhakov, a centrist Duma member who is running for re-election. Korzhakov, one of Yeltsin's former bodyguards, has published a book that offers an insider's look at the Kremlin. The book is filled with anti-Semitic remarks about Jewish members of Yeltsin's entourage.

Breaking the standard of neutrality, the Russian Jewish Congress issued a statement two months ago urging voters not to support the Communists, whose leaders are known for their anti-Semitic remarks.

Jewish groups also criticized the Communists for including Nikolai Kondratenko, a former southern Russian governor known for his anti-Zionist rhetoric, in the second slot on his party's national list, right after party leader Gennady Zyuganov.

Ironically enough, last month the name of an RJC board member, Moscow Jewish banker Igor Linshitz, appeared on one of the regional candidate lists of the Communist Party. If elected, Linshitz would represent a Siberian district in which he has extensive business interests.

But observers agree: the Communists, though likely to end up the second largest party, with between 15 and 25 percent of the vote tally, are not necessarily the biggest threat to those who support liberal and free market values.

The Kremlin, with its ongoing fight for power inside the ruling elites, may pose an even greater threat for Russia's future.

"There is an apparent surge of authoritarianism going on in the country these days," said Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent political analyst.

Any talk about Russian politics nowadays revolves around the Kremlin-led pressure placed on oil giant Yukos and its Jewish founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who has been in prison for a month now. There's no evidence that many Russians are worried by the arrest, but Jews are already concerned.

"Jews are always sensitive when such situations occur," said Felgenhauer, adding that some of his Jewish acquaintances are more preoccupied of late with finding out how to apply for an Israeli passport than with the electoral prospects of various parties.

Although the state and the organized Jewish community have denied that the Yukos case and its embattled Jewish top management had anything to do with Judaism, many Jewish voters tend to view the upcoming election through the prism of the politically charged campaign against Khodorkovsky.

"Why does no one touch those oil tycoons who have Russian last names, and those with Jewish last names are either in prison or hiding in Israel," a mustached young Moscow Jew who gave his name as Dmitry asked rhetorically while nursing a beer at a Moscow club recently. □