

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Chirac backs religious ban

French President Jacques Chirac is backing a ban of visible religious insignia in state schools. Responding to recommendations from a presidential commission that proposed the ban, Chirac said Wednesday he hopes Parliament will adopt legislation before the beginning of the next school year.

However, Chirac said he doesn't favor the introduction of national school holidays to mark Yom Kippur or the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adhar, as the commission proposed. Nevertheless, he said, students could be excused from school on religious holidays by agreement with school principals. Jewish leaders welcomed Chirac's statement.

Recalcitrant terrorists

Palestinian terrorist groups refused a cease-fire despite assurances that Washington would pressure Israel to reciprocate. On their second day of meetings with Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah in Gaza City on Wednesday, Egyptian mediators renewed a unilateral cease-fire proposal that they had made at a previous round of Cairo talks two weeks ago.

This time, the Egyptians came bearing a U.S. pledge to pressure Israel to withdraw forces from Palestinian cities if a cease-fire went forward, but the terrorist groups demurred. "We have reiterated the same position we adopted in Cairo," Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantissi said.

Hamas wants any cease-fire to bar only attacks on civilians inside Israel proper, not Israeli soldiers or Jewish civilians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Suing Saddam for Scuds

The daughter of the Israeli killed by Iraq's 1991 Scud missile strikes on Israel wants Saddam Hussein executed. "I will go anywhere necessary, including Iraq, in order to testify against him, and I will ask to join the team investigating this murderer," Smadar Weinberg, a lawyer from Metulla, told Israel's Ma'ariv newspaper Wednesday.

Weinberg's father, Eitan Grondland, was killed when a Scud slammed into his home in Ramat Gan in January 1991. Dozens of Israelis were hurt in the 39 Scud strikes during the Persian Gulf War, but Grondland was the only fatality. Israeli officials say they intend to file suit for damages from the missile attacks in any war-crimes trial against Saddam.

ARTS & CULTURE

Heeb and the gang seeking a new, cooler Jewish community

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — It could have been a scene from New York's beatnik past: A group of young hipsters gathered at a Greenwich village apartment for an artistic venture they hoped would change history — or at least rock the establishment.

But these beats call themselves Heeb, and their universe is the alternative Jewish world.

"Heeb is a special subset of the genus Jew," explains Joshua Neuman, 31, the new editor-in-chief and only paid staffer of Heeb magazine, a hipper-than-thou take on modern Jewish identity.

In Neuman's apartment — which is furnished with the 1970s trappings of his childhood rec room and doubles as Heeb's editorial headquarters — volunteers lounge on green and yellow furniture and try to define Heebdom.

"It's something larger than the sum of its parts," says Michael Schiller, the magazine's senior editor.

And just being Jewish doesn't make one a Heeb — a point underscored in the current issue, which carries cut-out dolls of a pasty, puny Joe Lieberman in underpants.

Lieberman is "totally un-self-conscious," says Neuman, a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School who teaches Jewish philosophy at New York University.

One thing about Heeb is clear: With its gritty irony, the nearly two-year-old magazine has both spawned and cashed in on a thriving alternative Jewish culture.

For many drawn to its glossy pages, Heeb provides a long-sought Jewish home.

Cynthia Katz, 21, an NYU student interning at Heeb, says she finally found Jewish community at the magazine. Katz, who rarely attends synagogue and says most of her friends aren't Jewish, says NYU's Hillel was "just not my scene."

Indeed, Heeb taps into a young Jewish generation that thirsts for Judaism but rejects its standard trappings.

Schiller says Heeb is about "feeling connected to your cultural heritage," without having to conform to a particular denomination.

Neuman says today's young Jews crave the Jewish identity captured by the Philip Roths of their parents' era, simultaneously embracing and mocking Jewish culture.

Epitomizing the trend is the movie "The Hebrew Hammer."

In the spoof comedy, a Jewish superhero played by Adam Goldberg fights an evil Santa who tries to wipe out Chanukah by dousing Jewish children with the equivalent of Christian kryptonite — free copies of the Christmas classic, "It's a Wonderful Life."

Shooting up a neo-Nazi bar after downing shots of Manischewitz, arousing his Jewish girlfriend with "dirty talk" about their future children's schools and milking conspiracy theories about Jewish media control, "The Hebrew Hammer" is Blaxploitation for Jews. The film's Web site says director Jonathan Kesselman hoped to create "a new hero for a new generation."

Another part of the "Jew cool" trend is the emergence of Jewish apparel — though not traditional garb. Take Jewcy, a clothing line that also sponsors entertainment events and gives the proceeds to Jewish non-profit organizations.

"Being Jewcy is a lifestyle. It's pro-Manischewitz, pro-Jewfro, pro-Barney's Warehouse Sale. It's knishes with a knasty attitude! To be Jewcy is to be bold and visible, vocal and proud," states the clothing line's Web site, www.jewcy.com.

The trend recently was the cover story of New York's bible of cool: Time Out

MIDEAST FOCUS

Shalom: Don't ignore Syria

Israel should heed remarks made by Syria's president about peace talks, Israel's foreign minister said. Silvan Shalom said Wednesday that Bashar Assad's recent comments to The New York Times on opportunities for peace with Israel may be an attempt to curry favor with the United States, but still should not be ignored.

Iran to allow nuclear access

Iran said it will allow inspectors unfettered access to its nuclear facilities. Iran will sign an additional protocol to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty that will allow U.N. inspectors access to all its facilities, Iran's vice president, Gholamreza Aghazadeh, said Wednesday. The signing will take place Thursday.

Iran had allowed inspectors access only to some sites, leading to threats of sanctions from Western countries.

No injuries in blasts

No injuries were reported after two bombs exploded near an Israeli outpost in the Gaza Strip.

An Israeli official said the second blast Wednesday was designed to injure the rescue teams who typically arrive after the first blast. Hamas claimed responsibility for both bombings.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers reportedly killed a Palestinian youth after a tank came under fire in the Gaza Strip. Witnesses said the 16-year-old was shot dead near the site of a mine attack against an Israeli tank in Rafah, along the Gaza-Egypt boundary.

Iraqi baby dies in Israel

An Iraqi baby brought to Israel for emergency surgery died Wednesday. Bayan Jassem, who suffered from a heart defect, came to Israel in November, weeks after she was born. She developed complications following a 10-hour operation on Nov. 26.



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magazine featured Goldberg under the banner "The New SuperJews."

London's Guardian newspaper followed up last weekend with a story on the emerging trend.

"This generation has thrown off the old stereotypes of Jewish America, with its concentration on the family and the synagogue," the Guardian wrote. "Out go bagels, Woody Allen-style neuroses and Yiddish. In come clubbing, dance music, radical Jewish magazines and new Jewish fiction."

"I think we just tapped into the Zeitgeist of what was going on with young people," Jewcy's co-founder, Jon Steingart, said in an interview with the Guardian. "We just applied Jewishness to having a young, hip style, and it took off."

Heeb hopes not just to ride the trend but to drive it.

"We're trying to create an empire," Neuman says, admitting that he has "megalomaniacal dreams" for the publication.

In the meantime, the magazine is extending its reach. Its newly interactive Web site boasts a calendar with coast-to-coast event listings like Heeb Chanukah parties, and a "kvetching board" for online chatter.

With Chanukah approaching, the magazine is getting about 30 new subscription orders a day, Neuman says.

But not everyone is sold on Heeb's message. The magazine's debut prompted concern at the Anti-Defamation League, and the groups says it still is concerned.

Adopting a "title for a publication that is offensive to many Jews is unnecessary and in my view counterproductive," said Ken Jacobson, ADL's associate national director.

"One could argue this is a sign that Jews have really made it, that people can poke fun and really satirize." However, "we're also living in a world where anti-Semitism is flourishing," he said. "The usual sensitivity should continue and not assume that things are so secure."

Others say the magazine fills a critical niche.

Rejecting Heeb is like saying "the Beatles were bad for today's youth when they appeared on the Ed Sullivan show," said Roger Bennett, vice president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, whose network of young philanthropists, Natan, gave Heeb a \$20,000 grant last month. "We'll look back at those voices with the same kind of perspective."

As a parallel, Bennett cited the ability of Christian rock to engage Christian youth.

"Heeb is still finding its voice," Bennett said, but there's "no doubt that it has had an incredible reception" with its target audience. "We ignore its ability to develop connectivity at our peril."

The UJA-Federation of New York renewed a \$60,000 grant to Heeb this spring. The sum constitutes about 40 percent of the magazine's revenue, according to Neuman.

The money went toward developing a business plan to assure the magazine's "long-term health and viability," said Deborah Joselow, managing director of the UJA-Federation's commission on Jewish identity and renewal.

Joselow said Heeb represents a particular mode of Jewish outreach.

"The UJA-Federation tries to fund multiple strategies of multiple engagement," Joselow said. "Our long-term vision is people who are knowledgeable, experienced and committed to Jewish life and living. Everybody is going to choose a different gateway, and we have to make sure those doors are wide and welcoming."

Heeb, which publishes twice a year, has maintained a circulation of roughly 20,000, but Neuman estimates that its readership has reached 90,000.

A quarter of the magazine's subscribers are in New York, followed by Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle.

Neuman, who has brought in a business team and tripled advertising in the magazine, says he hopes to turn Heeb into a profitable venture.

Though the magazine is crammed with kitsch, it also tackles issues of substance. In the current issue, for example, editorial director Mike Edison goes undercover in Jews for Jesus as a would-be convert. Describing with humor the tactics of the Christian missionaries, Edison adds a jolt of Jewish pride.

"I'm a New York Jew. I can kvetch and haggle with the best of them," he writes. "Salvation, however, is the one thing I will not buy wholesale." □

JEWISH WORLD

Report: Mideast peace unlikely

Israel and the Palestinians are unlikely to reach a peace agreement before 2020, a U.S. intelligence report said. But the forecast could change when Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat dies, the report said.

The report, written by the National Intelligence Council, which operates under the aegis of CIA Director George Tenet, also said unconventional weapons could be used if Israel gets into a war with an Arab state.

"In the Israel-Arab conflict, there have been pleasant surprises, but the dispute has almost always reverted back to spheres of hostility and suspicion," the report said.

Poll: Americans like Israel

American support for Israel is holding steady, according to a new poll.

Forty percent of Americans sympathize with Israel over the Palestinians, while 15 percent sympathize more with the Palestinians, according to a poll of 1,200 people released Wednesday by the Anti-Defamation League.

Gallup polls in 2001 and 2002 reported nearly identical results.

In the latest ADL poll, 39 percent of respondents said they believe the Palestinians are more responsible for the current violence and 16 percent said Israel bears more responsibility — results also similar to ADL and Gallup polls taken in recent years.

Paris rally for 'Geneva accord'

More than 2,000 people filled a Paris theater to mark the launch of the French campaign for the "Geneva accord."

Grouping a number of Muslim and Jewish groups together with leading figures from across France's political spectrum, Wednesday's event also featured a surprise entrance by the unofficial peace proposal's principal negotiators, Israeli Yossi Beilin and Palestinian Yasser Abed Rabbo.

According to a recent poll, most Israelis and Palestinians oppose the Geneva proposal, which has been criticized by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and has drawn some muted support from Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Reform backs museum for blacks

A Reform Jewish group praised the signing of an act to establish an African American museum.

President Bush this week signed an act for a National Museum of African American History after Congress had overwhelmingly approved it.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism wrote to Bush to thank him for his "commitment to this worthy cause."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Campaign money laws examined: Laws unlikely to affect Jewish giving

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish community officials say the new campaign finance laws will not change the way they do business or affect the Jewish community's influence in politics.

Most Jewish groups were silent last week when the Supreme Court upheld a ban on unlimited contributions to political parties, known as soft money. The Jewish community had, with some exceptions, remained out of the fray during the years-long debate over campaign finance reform.

The conundrum for the Jewish community was whether Jews should support legislation that would level the playing field for all groups to contribute to the political process, or oppose a law that could reduce the influence of Jews.

Several Jewish leaders said they felt uncomfortable backing the McCain-Feingold legislation when it moved through Congress last year because Jews had done so well under the old rules. Soft money often bought Jews political access.

Soft-money donations to political parties previously were unregulated, and Jews were large donors to both political parties. The money was used to promote the party and to buy advertisements to support candidates in individual races.

"Soft money clearly bought access to people and got them seats at various meeting tables and convention tables," said Ken Goldstein, professor of political science and Judaic studies at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. "Jews have been major soft-money contributors."

Haim Saban, a Jewish media mogul, gave a \$7 million check to the Democratic National Committee shortly before the new laws went into effect last year for the construction of the Democratic National Committee's high-tech headquarters.

Other Jewish fund-raisers say they are not worried that Jewish influence in politics will wane because of the new regulations.

Morris Amitay, treasurer of Washington PAC, a pro-Israel fund-raising political action committee, said Jews largely support individual candidates, not political parties. Such direct donations to campaigns are known as hard money. The amount of hard money a candidate can receive from a donor was increased as part of the new campaign finance laws, to \$2,000 from \$1,000.

In 2002, the Jewish community played a large financial role in the defeat of two incumbent lawmakers, Earl Hilliard (D-Ala.) and Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.), by giving large donations to their primary challengers, Arthur Davis and Denis Majette, respectively. Hilliard and McKinney had been among Israel's harshest critics in Congress. Those donations were almost entirely hard-money gifts.

"It's the corporations and the interest groups that give the big bucks that are now more constrained," Amitay said.

Supporters of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the lead Israel lobbyist in Washington, also give hard-money donations to congressional candidates.

Goldstein said that the pool of people that can contribute \$2,000 to a campaign is small, and Jews who can give that amount still will be courted and influential. And with fewer people giving million-dollar donations, the influence of individual donors who give at the \$2,000 level will rise.

Goldstein said that with the fall of soft money, the influence of "bundlers" — those who can amass numerous checks from like-minded people — would rise and be more important in Jewish community fund-raising circles.

"The focus is going to be on going through the Rolodex and raising funds," Goldstein said.

He said the Jewish community, with its long-established institutional structures, might be at an advantage in this area. Jewish groups were active in this area for years, before soft money became a key avenue for givers.

Only the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism backed the Supreme Court decision last week. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

It's an e-mail brouhaha as Dean blames Rove for attacks

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Howard Dean is smarting from e-mails that distort his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and he has suggested that President Bush's right-hand man is behind the e-mail campaign.

Speaking Monday to the Pacific Council on International Policy, a leadership forum in Los Angeles, Dean said he believed Karl Rove, the White House's senior political adviser, is behind an e-mail campaign that has flooded inboxes of American Jews across the country.

The White House referred calls about Rove's alleged involvement in the e-mail campaign to the Bush/Cheney re-election campaign. Scott Stanzel, a campaign spokesman, said the campaign does not respond to comments by the Democratic contenders.

The message in the e-mails is that Dean wants an "even-handed" policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many Jews consider that a way of saying that the United States should be less supportive of Israel.

"I've discovered that 'even-handedly' is a code word to certain people who think that is being unfair, and I don't want to ever repeat that word again," Dean said in the question-and-answer session after the speech in which he outlined his vision for foreign affairs and national security. "It is now making its way around the Internet in an unsigned piece of literature, undoubtedly from one of my worthy opponents, perhaps Karl Rove."

Dean made the comments in an exchange with a questioner who wanted to know how he would deal more even-handedly with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Matthew Dorf, Dean's liaison to the Jews, said the audience broke into laughter after Dean said it. However, Dorf reiterated Dean's comment that the e-mails are politically motivated.

"It's clearly the work of political opponents and not true friends of Israel," he said.

The comments came as Dean announced a slew of foreign policy advisers, including one who has drawn some criticism from the American Jewish community. Claude Prestowitz, president of the Economic Strategy Institute, will advise Dean on globalization and international economics.

Prestowitz is the author of "Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions," in which he says that U.S. aid to Israel should be made conditional on Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a freeze on settlement development and the uprooting of most settlements.

Prestowitz told JTA on Tuesday that he has not discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or U.S. support for Israel with the Dean campaign, and that he has assisted several campaigns, though he refused to say which ones. He said he would not offer his views on Israel "unless I'm asked."

Steve Grossman, national co-chairman of Dean for America and a former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said Prestowitz is one of a number of advisers with whom Dean has consulted, and that Dean does not believe aid to Israel should be conditional on Israeli action.

Prestowitz's views on Israel are "180 degrees opposite Howard Dean's own beliefs," Grossman said. But, he added, "If

we dismissed any potential adviser because their writing did not conform 100 percent to the candidate's views, we wouldn't have many advisers."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said people will be looking at the advisers Dean surrounds himself with since the candidate himself lacks foreign policy experience — and people are concerned about Prestowitz.

"His views certainly seem to be problematic," Hoenlein said. "It certainly doesn't send a positive signal."

Meanwhile, the e-mails, which have been widely circulated in the past few weeks, highlight comments Dean made in September, when he said it was not in America's interest to "take sides" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Howard Dean promised that if he is elected president, the United States will no longer support Israel the way it has in the past under both Democratic and Republican presidents," one of the e-mails says. "In his own words, he will insist that the United States be 'even handed.'"

The e-mail also makes reference to other Dean comments and says, "I urge you that if you have any love for America and Israel you should not and cannot vote for Howard Dean for the office of president."

Dean has since spent a great deal of time and energy clarifying his views. He has said that he meant that Bush, by downgrading U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict early on in his administration, had abandoned the role of honest broker.

Dean also has emphasized his support for Israel. He said in his speech Monday that he believed the U.S. alliance with Israel "will always be and must remain unshakable, and so will be my commitment, every day of my administration, to work with the parties for a solution that ends decades of blood and tears."

Other Democratic candidates have chastised Dean for being insensitive, at the very least, for using a term like "taking sides."

On its Web site, the Anti-Defamation League called the e-mail campaign against Dean "malicious, misleading and factually inaccurate."

"In response to concerns about his September speech, Gov. Dean has assured the Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish organizations of his support for the State of Israel and his belief in the importance of strong U.S.-Israeli relations," the Web site reads.

The Dean campaign says it has been responding aggressively to the e-mail campaign. People who contact Dean about the e-mails receive an e-mail from Dorf providing information on Dean's positions on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The jab at Rove was not the first time Dean put out an unsubstantiated rumor and then insisted he was speaking facetiously. Earlier this month, Dean suggested that the White House had advance notice from Saudi Arabia of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Conspiracy charges against Rove play well to Dean's base in the Democratic Party, which regards Rove as unscrupulous.

Matthew Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said the charge against Rove was ridiculous and that he was sure the e-mail was not coming from Republicans.

"If it makes Howard Dean feel better to blame others for holding him accountable to his own on-the-record statement and views, then so be it," Brooks said.

"However, to blame the Bush campaign, and specifically Karl Rove, is both untrue and unfair." □