

IN THE NEWS

Kerry wins Jewish support

Exit polls from Tuesday's primaries show that Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) won the Jewish vote in Arizona and Delaware.

In Arizona, Kerry captured 43 percent of the Jewish vote, followed by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), who garnered 23 percent. Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean received 14 percent and retired Gen. Wesley Clark got 12 percent.

In Delaware, Kerry won 40 percent of the Jewish vote, followed by Lieberman with 29 percent, Clark with 11 percent and Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) with 10 percent.

Annan praises withdrawal plan

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan endorsed Ariel Sharon's plan to uproot Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip.

Speaking Wednesday at the United Nations in New York, Annan said, "I was quite intrigued by Prime Minister Sharon's decision to pull out of Gaza. I think it's a positive development, and I hope the Quartet" — a diplomatic group of the United States, United Nations, the European Union and Russia that is working for Israeli-Palestinian peace — "can work with him in implementing the decision."

Sides discuss possible summit

Israeli and Palestinian officials met to prepare a possible summit between the two sides' prime ministers.

Ariel Sharon's chief of staff, Dov Weisglass, met Wednesday with Hassan Abu Libdeh, his counterpart in Ahmed Qurei's office.

Until now, Qurei has rebuffed invitations to meet with Sharon, but the United States, the chief backer of the "road map" peace plan, has stepped up pressure on the Palestinian Authority premier to hold a summit. No date has yet been set.

WORLD REPORT

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Favorite son to poor showing: What went wrong for Lieberman?

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

ARLINGTON, Va. (JTA) — Four years ago, he was the toast of the Jewish world, the favorite son who became a symbol of opportunity for American Jews in the United States.

But when he went out on his own this time around, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) failed to catch on as a top-tier candidate.

Lieberman stepped down Tuesday night, after failing to win any of the nine primaries or caucuses since the presidential season began. He came in second in only one of seven contests Tuesday, in Delaware.

"The judgment of the voters is now clear," he told supporters at his headquarters in Virginia.

It had been clear for a while. Even Lieberman's mother, Marcia, had acknowledged earlier that her son's campaign "didn't catch on."

Now the question will be asked for years to come: What went wrong? Was his religion a factor — especially for Jews? Are his politics out of sync with Democratic voters? Was it his style?

When Lieberman announced his candidacy in January 2003, he had the best name recognition among the Democratic hopefuls, because of his national exposure as the vice presidential nominee on the 2000 ticket with Al Gore. But even as he was leading in the polls then, political analysts did not consider him in the top tier of candidates.

"Name recognition that he earned from the national race four years ago never persuaded me he was a credible contender for the nomination," said Stuart Rothenberg, an independent political analyst.

There are many explanations for Lieberman's fall. Some say it was political. Lieberman is a moderate on social, economic and political issues, someone who supported the Iraq war and was campaigning among a Democratic electorate angered by the Bush administration's handling of Iraq and his domestic policies.

In his announcement, Lieberman said he still believed that moderation was the best way to go.

"I offered a mainstream voice and I still believe that that is the right choice and the winning choice for our party and our country," he said.

While that positioning might have served him well against Bush in November, it missed the point of Democratic primaries playing to the party's base.

Others say his mistakes were strategic, suggesting that Lieberman had a sense of entitlement because of the election controversies of 2000, and therefore did not lay the groundwork for his candidacy the way his opponents did.

Then there is the Jewish question.

While no one expected Lieberman to receive the full support of American Jews, some Lieberman loyalists say they did not anticipate the extent to which his candidacy would be rejected by some in their community.

Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, president of the Jewish Life Network Foundation, and his wife Blu, were circulating an op-ed to Jewish newspapers this week, arguing that Jews were acting as anti-Semites would, casting Lieberman aside because of his Jewishness.

"The community blinked," Yitz Greenberg said, suggesting that his policies were "a good

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AMERICA
DECIDES

■ *Political, social and religious factors did the candidate in*

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fit" for Jews. A rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionist sentiment around the world brought old fears to the surface for many Jews, he argued, and Jews looked for a safer choice for president.

"The community made a huge mistake," he said. "A victory for a Jew in America would have been a tremendous refutation of anti-Semitism."

Some Jewish donors said they would have given to Lieberman, based on his political stances, but did not want to support a Jew at this time.

It was easier to support Lieberman as a vice presidential nominee, some Jews say, because he was blazing the trail without being the center of attention.

But as his own candidate — and at a time with increased tension in the Middle East and an uptick in international anti-Semitism — hesitancy grew.

Marvin Lender, a member of Lieberman's campaign board who raised funds for him in the Jewish community, suggested that Lieberman aides had anticipated raising more money from the Jewish community.

Lender blames the fear as one element, but says the Jewish community's political sophistication also hurt Lieberman's chances.

"Many leaders of the Jewish community, the politically invested people, had already made commitments," he said.

Indeed, many seasoned political donors in the Jewish community had ties to other candidates — such as Sen. John Kerry (D-

Mass.) or Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), or several of the candidates at once.

It was much easier to support Lieberman in 2000, when he was not running against other Democrats.

Not all Jewish analysts believe Lieberman was hurt by his community. He still galvanized many Jews who may not have given in past political races to donate, they say, but did not get the support from others because of his moderate politics.

"Jews were happy for Lieberman, happy he could run for president, but sadly, just didn't embrace his politics," said Steve Rabinowitz, a Democratic media strategist.

No one suggests that the mixed reaction Lieberman received from Jews is the whole story of his candidacy's demise.

Many say the candidate did not work hard enough to build off of the name recognition and exposure he received as Gore's running mate in 2000, reaching out to party contributors in key primary states.

Some say Lieberman had a sense of entitlement, assuming that Democratic anger over the Florida recount, the Supreme Court decision signaling the defeat of the Democrats that year and the fact that Gore won the popular vote, would be enough to bring voters to his side.

His campaign appearances often reflected on his 2000 experiences.

"What a shame 2000 was," Lieberman told a retirement community in Boca Raton, Fla. in October. "We had the votes, but not the five votes on the Supreme Court."

When Lieberman campaigned last year, voters remembered the war in Iraq, which Lieberman supported, and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks a lot more clearly than they did the 2000 election scandals.

He suggested Tuesday night that he would continue to channel the anger left over from 2000 but now, in service of whomever wins the nomination, pledging to "deny George Bush a second term."

Others say that he was handicapped by his choice to wait to launch his campaign this year until Gore decided not to enter the race. However, Gen. Wesley Clark entered the race late, but has fared bet-

ter than Lieberman. Lieberman did not stress his electability enough on the trail, analysts suggested.

"Voters wanted somebody who could really stick it to Bush and is confrontational and aggressive," Rothenberg said.

That wasn't Lieberman. "He's like your favorite uncle, but he doesn't portray that kind of dynamism," Rothenberg said. "He doesn't cut a big political profile."

Lieberman was true to form Tuesday, starting his drop-out speech by congratulating Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.)

and Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) for their wins, and praising all the others for fights well fought.

Jewish political leaders say that despite his poor showing, Lieberman's candidacy was historic.

Only two other Jews have tried to seek the presidency — Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) in 1996 and the late Pennsylvania Gov. Milton Shapp in 1976 — but neither got as far as Lieberman.

"He has carried himself as a national candidate and handled masterfully the few times people brought up his religion," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

"In doing that, even that small gesture, he has blazed a path for future candidates who might one day be president of the United States."

Lieberman never shied away from his faith, citing it as an inspiration Tuesday night. He ended his concession speech by paraphrasing traditional morning prayers, saying he would continue "to serve the Lord during the day with as much gladness and as much purpose as I can."

Lieberman supporters, frustrated by how their candidate did in the Jewish community, suggest more dialogue is needed to convince Jews that having a member of the tribe in the White House is not a bad thing.

"We have to square our shoulders and look at these issues directly and talk more about it," said Blu Greenberg, founding president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance.

Joseph Lieberman is 'like your favorite uncle. He doesn't cut a big political profile.'

Stuart Rothenberg
Political analyst

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Jewish groups prepare for fence fight

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the International Court of Justice holds hearings on Israel's West Bank security fence later this month, it could become a repeat of Durban, Jewish activists fear.

The anti-Zionist agitation at Durban's U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Sept. 2001 was so frenzied that Israel and the United States stalked out of the conference — and it shocked a Jewish world horrified by the virulence of the anti-Semitism on display.

In the end, Europe negotiated a compromise government resolution condemning anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. But a companion meeting of non-governmental organizations blasted Israel with a resolution damning the Jewish state for alleged apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

The U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution asking the International Court of Justice at The Hague to issue an advisory opinion on Israel's West Bank security fence. The court will convene hearings on Feb. 23.

Some Jewish activists fear the worst. "We expect this to be like Durban — except worse," said Amy Goldstein, the director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith International.

While several activists say anti-Israel demonstrations outside the courtroom likely will be vitriolic, they call the court a venerable institution that will conduct its business respectfully.

The court's opinion is non-binding. At stake, however, is the politicization of the international court, the possibility that countries will use a negative decision as

grounds to sanction Israel and the fear that a court decision will prejudge a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, Jewish officials say.

The Palestinians are "trying to get a lot more out of this decision than just a finding on some of the legal facts," said Felice Gaer, director of international organizations at the American Jewish Committee. "They're actually trying to go well beyond the issue of the fence into core issues of dispute with regard to the conflict."

With that in mind, Jewish activists are gearing up for the hearings. Among the planned activities:

- Jewish groups like B'nai B'rith and Israeli officials plan to hold press conferences at The Hague to counter expected polemics.

- Zaka — the Israeli emergency services group that gives first-aid to victims of terrorism and gathers their body parts for Jewish burial — may bring the shell of a bombed-out bus to The Hague.

- The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations is due to meet Thursday with a group of legal experts to craft pro-Israel strategies in response to the hearing and ruling.

- Amcha-Coalition for Jewish Concerns plans to set up its own court outside The Hague and at the United Nations, mocking the ICJ proceedings as a sham, said Amcha's vice president, Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld.

"What's really going on here is old-fashioned anti-Semitism under the guise of European enlightenment," Herzfeld said.

- The board of the AJCommittee, currently on a mission abroad, is meeting with European diplomats and protesting the

fact that the fence issue is going before the court. Some activists feel bolstered by the fact that dozens of countries — including the United States, France, Germany and Russia — recently submitted briefs to the court, objecting to what they called political exploitation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"So far we are encouraged because about 40 countries, including most of the important democracies in the world, submitted briefs to the court saying that — while they don't agree with Israel on the necessity to build the fence — nevertheless they don't think the ICJ is the right way to deal with it," said Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations. "This is very important."

Mekel and others say they have faith in the court.

There's "no question that the Arabs intend to turn The Hague into another Durban" and "to put pressure on the court by making demonstrations," he said.

But the court won't be affected by the antics of Palestinian U.N. representative Nasser Al-Kidwa within the courtroom or of his supporters outside, Mekel said.

"I think they will look at the merits" of the case and the opinion of the countries against it, he said.

In the meantime, Israel and Jewish groups are preparing, hoping they can mount a more effective response than they did in Durban.

"If there will be demonstrations, if there will be attempts to turn The Hague into a Durban, there will be an Israeli response and a Jewish response," Mekel said.

Ilan Ramon's work to be highlighted

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel plans to showcase Col. Ilan Ramon's experiments in space at a conference at the lowest point on Earth.

Science Minister Eliezer Zandberg said Tuesday that the results of the late Israeli astronaut's experiments aboard the doomed Columbia space shuttle would be presented at a conference in May at a venue near the Dead Sea.

Zandberg was addressing an Israeli Embassy event in Washington, commemorating the first anniversary of the shuttle's disintegration.

All seven astronauts aboard died, including Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut.

NASA chief Sean O'Keefe presented Ramon's widow, Rona, with two flags used in NASA ceremonies, one Israeli and the other American, and with two posthumous medals marking Ramon's service.

In a related development, Ramon will have a hill named for him on Mars.

Seven hills on Mars were named after the crew of the ill-fated Columbia.

The names for the hills, located east of the landing site of the Mars rover Spirit, will go before the International Astronomical Union that approves names of celestial body names.

The Columbia crew died in February 2003 when the shuttle disintegrated upon re-entry to earth's atmosphere.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Gibson to cut blame scene?

Mel Gibson reportedly will delete a scene from his movie that echoes the charge of blaming the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion.

A spokesman told JTA that Gibson is still editing the final cut of "The Passion of the Christ" — due for release on Feb. 25, Ash Wednesday — and The New York Times reported that he agreed yesterday to delete a controversial scene.

An unnamed associate told the paper that the actor-director will remove a scene in which the Jewish high priest Caiaphas invokes a curse on the Jews by saying, "His blood be on us and on our children," which appears only in the New Testament book of Matthew.

The line, which has appeared in passion plays over the centuries, has sparked anti-Semitic violence, but the Vatican issued a ruling 40 years ago that contemporary Jews could not be blamed for Jesus' death.

Bush names two to Holocaust council

President Bush named two new members to the board of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

Bush on Wednesday named Tony Gelbart of Boca Raton, Fla., and Harry Reicher of New York City. Gelbart is the CEO of CPM Worldwide Group, an investment company with holdings in Israel, and is a vice chairman of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

Reicher is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and has studied legal issues surrounding the Holocaust.

Birthingright for disabled

Birthingright Israel held its first trip for developmentally disabled youth.

Last month's program, coordinated by the Orthodox Union's National Jewish Council for Disabilities and its Yachad program, sent developmentally disabled youth on the free trip to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds.

At Masada, participants role-played a scene of the battle that took place at the historical fortress, and at Yad Vashem they studied the stories of children who survived the Holocaust.

WORLD

Italy pressed to fight anti-Semitism

The lower house of Italy's Parliament passed three motions calling on the government to fight anti-Semitism.

On Wednesday, lawmakers said the government should monitor the situation and take concrete measures, including educational programs in schools, to "accentuate the struggle against this execrable phenomenon."

Torahs being restored

The Rabbinical Center of Europe will restore 80 Torah scrolls damaged during the Holocaust.

The scrolls will be sent to emerging Jewish communities in Europe. The Brussels-based organization, which is associated with Chabad Lubavitch, also plans to collaborate with the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation to expand vacation and exchange programs for Jewish children in Eastern and Western Europe. The Rabbinical Center made the announcements at the close of a three-day conference in Vienna of more than 100 Orthodox rabbis associated with the group.

AMIA prosecution begins wrap-up

Prosecutors in the AMIA bombing case began closing statements Tuesday. The prosecution demanded life prison for five local defen-

dants accused of playing a role in the 1994 bombing of Argentina's main Jewish community center, which killed 85 people.

In addition, the prosecution accused the government of former President Carlos Menem, as well as Argentine police and intelligence officers, of blocking the investigation.

Hillel draws crowd in Moscow

Dozens of young Jewish leaders gathered in Moscow on Wednesday for an annual Hillel conference.

The Jewish student organization, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in the former Soviet Union this year, currently operates 27 centers serving student communities in seven countries in the region.

MIDDLE EAST

Power to the people

Ariel Sharon said a referendum should be held on his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

"That sounds like a good idea, which would make clear what the public thinks," the Israeli prime minister told reporters Wednesday in response to a suggestion from members of his Likud Party.

Sharon's right-wing coalition allies have threatened to bring down his government over a plan, announced this week, to remove most Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. However, polls show public support of around 60 percent in favor of the plan.

Analysts believe Sharon would have little trouble passing a referendum on unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians.

Blackmail charge

Yasser Arafat's security adviser accused Washington of blackmailing the Palestinian Authority over an attack on U.S. diplomats.

"I think the Americans are using this isolated case in order not to be involved, in order to blackmail the Palestinian Authority," Jibril Rajoub told reporters in Ramallah, apparently alluding to American threats to make USAID funding to the Palestinians conditional on solving an Oct. 15 attack on a U.S. Embassy convoy in Gaza, which killed three guards.

Ethiopians lobby Sharon

Ethiopian organizations in Israel called for the immediate implementation of a decision to bring over Ethiopian Falash Mura.

The letter was sent last week by 17 groups to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The letter comes ahead of a Feb. 12 High Court date in which judges will hear a petition filed by Falash Mura activists, who claim the government has unnecessarily delayed implementation of its decision to bring the remaining 20,000 members of the community to Israel.

International judge won't go

The International Court of Justice refused an Israeli request to remove one of the judges who will hear the West Bank security fence case. The court refused Israel's argument that comments made in the past by Nabil Elaraby of Egypt betrayed his bias on the issue. Fifteen judges will hear the case Feb. 23 at The Hague.

Immigrant suicide

A Falash Mura man committed suicide after losing hope that Israel would allow his children to immigrate to the Jewish state. Abebe Asechnke, 55, hung himself at an absorption center in the southern town of Kiryat Gat on Tuesday, leaving behind a note that said he decided to kill himself because Israel was not bringing over his children from Ethiopia.