

IN THE NEWS
Peretz seeks early elections

Israel's new Labor Party chief is expected this week to call for early elections. [Story, Pg. 3]

UJC assembly opens in Toronto

The annual General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities opened in Toronto.

Thousands of Jewish delegates are on hand for the event, which runs through Wednesday.

Israeli troops kill 2 terrorists

Israeli forces killed two Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Troops on patrol in the West Bank city of Jenin on Saturday were fired on by a group of Al-Aksa Brigade gunmen.

The soldiers shot back, killing one of the gunmen and wounding two.

In the Gaza Strip, two Palestinian terrorists were spotted approaching the border fence with Israel, apparently intent on planting a bomb.

Troops shot at them, killing one and wounding the other.

Conspiracy blames Israel for terrorism

Some in Jordan are blaming last week's terrorist attacks on Israel.

"People don't blame Israel out of a vacuum," Rami Khoury, a Jordanian political commentator based in Lebanon, told The New York Times, explaining that "Israel has caused a lot of grief for Arab people one way or the other."

Conspiracy theories blaming Israel often percolate in the Arab world after terrorist attacks.

A group calling itself Al Qaida in Iraq claimed responsibility for the Nov. 9 attacks at three Jordanian hotels that killed at least 57 people.

WORLD REPORT

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California requires textbooks to teach religion with 'respect'

By SUE FISHKOFF

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (JTA) —Sixth-graders in America's most populous state will soon learn that Romans, not Jews, crucified Jesus.

The lesson could have been different had some of the textbooks approved by California this week gone through in their proposed form.

But when the California state board of education voted Nov. 9 to adopt new social studies textbooks for elementary and middle school students, it required nearly 1,000 edits and corrections to be made to the materials.

As a result, students will also learn that the biblical story of Exodus commemorates national liberation, not Jewish tribal unity; and that the Jewish God is a god of justice and mercy, not just reward and punishment.

Far from the spotlight of the public debate over evolution and intelligent design in science textbooks, a less-publicized battle was being waged for months over the religion content of social studies and history materials.

In its meeting, the state board of education voted unanimously to adopt 10 publishers' educational programs, including textbooks and related materials. Two publishers' materials were rejected for not meeting state standards.

Close to 200 of the nearly 1,000 edits and corrections had been put forward by the Institute for Curriculum Services, a project of the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council, which spent months reviewing all 12 of the proposed educational programs for bias against Judaism or inaccuracies in their depiction of Jewish history.

"You may be wondering why I and my

colleagues are here today, why this meeting is being covered by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and why would Jews all over the world care about your actions today," JCRC educational consultant Jackie Berman told the board during its five-hour public meeting.

"The answer is clear. The sixth-grade textbooks you are about to adopt contain the lessons that children will learn about the religions of the world, Judaism among them."

Getting the coveted seal of approval from California means big money to educational publishers. California is the nation's largest purchaser of school textbooks, and schools throughout the state may use public funds to purchase approved programs. Not only do other states often follow California's lead in their own adoptions, but as one board of education member noted at the meeting, publishers "write for our state."

California has mandated the study of religion since 1987. Students learn about Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity in sixth grade, and Islam in seventh grade.

In its adoption approvals, the board followed in every respect but one the recommendations made a month earlier by the state's curriculum development and supplemental materials commission.

The exception was the sixth-grade program submitted by Oxford University Press, which had been rejected in September by the state curriculum commission largely because of complaints of bias and factual error by the Hindu and Jewish communities.

The board voted to accept Oxford's program, noting that the publisher had spent the last month working closely with Hindu and Jewish groups to correct errors, and had

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■ *The textbook decision in California is seen as a bellwether for the United States*

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issued a written and verbal apology to the board.

"Oxford has been very cooperative, and we have reached agreement on changes with them," said Susan Mogull, a policy analyst with the Institute of Curriculum Services who urged the board this week to accept Oxford's sixth-grade program subject to those changes. She had spoken out strongly against the Oxford program in September.

"We're so pleased with the results," said an obviously relieved Casper Grathwohl, Oxford's reference division publisher, who had flown in from New York for the board of education meeting.

"We are extremely grateful for how gracious the ICS was in working with us and our scholars to better our program, and bring an appropriate respect for Judaism to it. That cooperation was the biggest factor in our being able to move the program back onto the table."

Board of education textbook adoption meetings are not heavily covered by the media, despite the fact that, as speaker after speaker reiterated, this is where tangible decisions are made that affect what and how children learn.

A special JTA investigation recently revealed how some Islamic organizations with political agendas were involved in the dissemination of biased and distorted teaching materials. It also showed how some groups were heavily involved in consulting with publishers on the development of textbooks. Some

critics contend that these organizations promote an uncritical approach to Islam.

One textbook, "History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond," published by the Teachers' Curriculum Institute, was piloted in Scottsdale, Ariz., earlier this year. But after a series of protests from parents — who objected to what they saw as distortions of Christianity and Judaism, with an overarching positive spin on Islam — the publisher decided to stop the trial.

"There was a lot of objection to the amount of coverage of Islam," Liz Russell, the development director of the Teachers' Curriculum Institute, which is based in Rancho Cordova, Calif., told JTA over the summer.

The book was developed to meet California standards, which require "a lot more on religion in general than most other states," she said.

"History Alive" was one of the programs adopted last week by California.

Close to 80 speakers addressed the education board during its five-hour meeting here, and the 13 board members listened to all of them carefully, discussing their major points publicly before voting on adoption.

Looking at the overflowing room and the long line of speakers waiting to address the board, Michael Berson, associate education professor at the University of South Florida who worked on one of the programs that was eventually adopted, said, "Bringing all these people together who are concerned about children's education is exciting."

Although the public's criticism "can be divisive," he said, "I think it's welcomed, I really do."

The vast majority of the speakers were Hindu and Sikh, communities who said they felt slighted by all the publishers' offerings.

"Hinduism is not treated with the same respect as Christianity or Judaism," complained Dr. Mihir Meghani, president of the Hindu American Foundation. "The sacred scriptures of Hinduism are

referred to as legends or myths," he said. In contrast, with Christian or Jewish biblical accounts, "they write 'the Bible says' or 'according to the Torah.'"

Sikh speakers told the board that although there are almost 600,000 Sikhs in the United States, half of them in California alone, none of the textbooks discusses Sikhism or shows pictures of Sikhs so children can learn to identify and respect them.

These complaints highlight some of the difficulties faced by board members as they waded through hundreds of pages of corrections and edits

submitted to them.

Brandishing one of the heavy documents, board member Ruth Bloom asked her colleagues how they were supposed to judge the content of all these textbooks and related materials in order to make educated decisions.

"How do you teach about religion in the context of history? Accurately and with respect," responded board president Ruth Green.

Berman said 187 of the group's edits and corrections were accepted by the ad-hoc committee on Oct. 31, including all of the major problems her group had found in the various textbooks. Oxford, she noted, promised to make every change her group requested.

"We have found all the publishers to be very cooperative," she said. "We feel the process is working and the books will be enormously improved from the standpoint of the Jewish community."

This kind of watchdog activism is crucial, says Amanda Susskind, Pacific Southwest regional director of the Anti-Defamation League. "If in our view a textbook is disseminating myths or untruths to children that perpetuate negative stereotypes about Jewish people or any other group of people, it is not only appropriate but necessary for us to respond," she said.

It is up to the publishers themselves to make the required changes, Berman said. She said her group would review the materials after they are published next spring "to make sure all the changes we requested were made."

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Jackie Berman

JCRC educational consultant

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After labor change, shake-up in Israeli politics

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The election of Amir Peretz, a 53-year-old underdog, as leader of the Labor Party is almost certain to change the face of Israeli politics.

The result of the Nov. 9 Labor primary vote makes more likely the formation of a new centrist party led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, backed by defectors from Labor and Likud. It creates the potential for a profound change in voting patterns, with many traditional Likud voters among the Sephardi working class likely to consider voting for the Moroccan-born Peretz. It puts Labor squarely on the left of the Israeli political divide, and clarifies its differences with Likud on key peacemaking and economic issues.

And at the very least it almost certainly means that elections, currently slated

for November 2006, will be moved up to the first half of the year.

Polls released last Friday suggest that Labor under Peretz would do well in those elections. Polls in Ha'aretz and Ma'ariv show Labor rising from its current 21 Knesset seats to 27 or 28 places in the legislature, with the Likud under Sharon winning 37 to 39.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The Ha'aretz poll also shows that if Sharon — who is facing strong internal dissent from Likud members who opposed his Gaza withdrawal plan — breaks away from Likud to form a new centrist party, it would win 32 seats to Labor's 27, with a Likud led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu finishing third with 25 seats.

These results reflect the situation before campaigning has even started. A good campaign could establish the untried Peretz as a bona fide national leader — and, some pundits believe, even could win the election for Labor.

Conversely, now that he's Labor leader, Peretz will become the prime target of Likud barbs. Should he fail to rise to the occasion, Labor's electoral fortunes could plummet.

Much will depend on what happens inside Labor. Peretz won 42 percent of the votes in the primary, scoring a stunning upset over incumbent Shimon Peres (40 percent) and former party leader Benjamin Ben-Eliezer (17 percent), despite the party establishment's efforts to stop him.

It's still unclear whether Labor heavyweights will accept Peretz's leadership or chip away at his authority from within the party, perhaps even breaking away to join a new centrist grouping under Sharon.

His challenges are great because of the very real possibility of a mass defection from Labor — possibly including Peres — to join Sharon. After the primary results were announced, Peres waited a day and half to congratulate Peretz on his victory — and even after doing so, confirmed that he was taking a "timeout" to consider his political future.

Peretz moved quickly to keep the party intact. He convened Labor's Knesset faction last Friday and asked them to give him

a chance to establish himself as leader. He met separately afterward with Peres, urging him to stay in Labor and help lead it.

Whether all this will be enough to keep Labor together remains to be seen.

Sharon's next moves will be decisive. After Likud rebels voted Nov. 7 in the Knesset against two ministerial appointments Sharon wanted to make, aides to the prime minister say a split in

Likud is all but certain, and that it's only a matter of timing. After the rebel vote, Sharon himself warned darkly that "there will be consequences."

Whether or not there are major political realignments, elections will probably be moved up to some time between March and May of next year. Peretz has made it clear that he intends to pull Labor out of the governing coalition within six weeks, and he and Sharon are due to meet soon to agree on a new election date.

Some Likud leaders, including Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, express concern at Peretz's potential to attract working-class Likud voters. Peretz himself told JTA that surveys he conducted showed that the Sephardi poor no longer see the Likud as their natural political home, opening up huge electoral possibilities for Labor.

Peretz was born in Morocco in 1952, came to Israel at the age of 4 and grew up in a poor home in the southern development town of Sderot. A gifted and charismatic speaker with a trademark handlebar moustache, he became mayor of Sderot at age 31, a Labor Knesset member at 36 and chairman of the Histadrut trade union federation at 43.

Peretz's political views are clear: On the Palestinian issue, he's a dove who believes in the feasibility of a final peace agreement; on the economy, he believes in free-market forces to create wealth and government intervention to distribute it more evenly.

On both the Palestinian and economic issues, he talks about a "moral road map" and says the occupation of the West Bank must end because it's corrupting for Israelis. He promises that if he becomes prime minister "there will not be a single hungry child" in Israel, and that he will raise the minimum wage to \$1,000 a month.

Israeli elections will probably be moved up to the first half of 2006.

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, meets Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem and Ramallah to nudge forward the peace process after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The United States wants the Palestinian Authority to crack down on terrorism and Israel to ease passage for the Palestinians. Rice also joins commemorations in Israel marking the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Also attending will be former President Clinton and Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.).

TUESDAY

■ Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg, delivers the annual Meyerhoff lecture at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on Washington's National Mall. Hilberg's lecture is titled "Auschwitz through the Lens of its Builders."

■ The Women's League for Conservative Judaism is hosting a symposium in New York highlighting the history and impact of the legal decisions that affect the lives of women, both within the American system of jurisprudence and Jewish law.

WEDNESDAY

■ The annual Koshersfest begins in New York. The annual two-day event highlights the latest innovations in the growing kosher food industry.

■ A resolution on the war in Iraq is expected to be discussed at the Union for Reform Judaism biennial. The four-day event takes place in Houston.

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

30 years since 'Zionism=Racism'

America's U.N. ambassador slammed a resolution that denigrated Zionism as racism on the 30th anniversary of the measure's passage. General Assembly Resolution 3379 was the world body's "single worst decision," John Bolton said Nov. 10.

He spoke at two events marking the anniversary of the infamous resolution. The events were sponsored by the American Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith International.

The B'nai B'rith event also marked the 60th anniversary of the United Nations.

The "Zionism=Racism" measure was repealed in 1991, but the anti-Israel animus that led to its passage still remains, Bolton said. "It's incredible that it was passed to begin with," said Bolton, who was instrumental in pushing for the measure's repeal. "It's incredible that it took 16 years to repeal it."

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Dan Gillerman, lauded recent Israeli gains at the United Nations but said more needs to be done. "Most of these achievements are achievements of atmosphere," he said, adding that he still hoped for "achievements of substance."

Prague community gets new head

Frantisek Banyai was elected Nov. 10 as chairman of Prague's Jewish community.

Banyai received 18 of 24 votes on the community board, which itself was chosen Nov. 6.

The community has been plagued by internal strife for more than a year, which Banyai and his supporters hope will end with the elections. Banyai and the board were elected through 2008.

Former chairman Tomas Jelinek, who had several conflicts with supporters of Banyai while in office, also was elected to the board and pledged to serve as an active opposition.

China may build 'Jewish neighborhood'

China may build a "Jewish neighborhood" in Shanghai, Chinese media reported.

The district would be modeled after the area that was home to thousands of Jews who came to Shanghai as refugees during World War II.

Kosher restaurants and clubs could help make the district a tourist attraction, Chinese officials hope.

MIDDLE EAST

Clinton praises Gaza withdrawal

President Clinton praised Ariel Sharon for engineering Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Addressing a Jerusalem audience Saturday as part of memorial events for the slain Yitzhak Rabin, Clinton praised "Prime Minister Sharon's astonishingly courageous withdrawal from Gaza."

But he warned against a long-term go-it-alone peace policy by Israel.

"As a strategy for the long term, the idea that Israel can proceed unilaterally forever, without a cooperative relationship with a successful Palestinian state, it seems to me highly premature to make that concession," he said.

Clinton, who coauthored the 1993 Oslo peace accords with then-Prime Minister Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and the late Yasser Arafat, called the agreement "what I still believe is our best chance for a comprehensive and lasting peace." He said that Arafat, by rejecting a peace offer by Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David in 2000, had made a "colossal historical blunder."

Restrictions on Palestinians eased

Israel eased restrictions on Palestinian movement. Israel's Defense Ministry announced Sunday that new permits to work in Israel would be issued to 8,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and 2,000 from the Gaza Strip.

Another 13,000 travel permits were issued to Palestinian merchants and hotel staff who work in Jerusalem.

The action to relieve restrictions that had been tightened since the Oct. 26 suicide bombing in Hadera came following intelligence reports of reduced terrorist threats, security sources said.

Hillary Clinton defends the fence

Hillary Clinton defended Israel's security barrier.

"I have to support the Israeli government decision to use this as a means to try and prevent terrorists from coming across," the New York senator, who is in Israel with her husband and their daughter, Chelsea, said Sunday during a tour of the fence route near Jerusalem.

"The Palestinian people have to help prevent terrorism," she said. "They have to change attitudes. It has to start with the Palestinian Authority and go throughout the entire society."

Palestinians mark year since Arafat died

Palestinians marked the one-year anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death last Friday.

Hundreds gathered by the late Palestinian Authority president's grave in Ramallah for a ceremony led by his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, Ha'aretz reported.

The event was attended by top officials from Palestinian factions along with several foreign diplomats.

"The Israelis and some Westerners are trying to delete Arafat from our memory, but he will remain alive in our hearts," said Israeli Arab lawmaker Ahmed Tibi, an Arafat confidant.

Arafat — who is buried at the Mukata, the crumbling headquarters that became his home during the intifada — died a year ago in France at age 75.

The cause of his death is still being debated.

NORTH AMERICA

Senate marks Rabin's death

The U.S. Senate unanimously commemorated the 10th anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination.

Voting Nov. 10 on a resolution initiated by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), the Senate expressed "its admiration for Yitzhak Rabin's legacy and reaffirms its commitment to the process of building a just and lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors."

An extremist shot Rabin after the prime minister's appearance at a peace rally on Nov. 4, 1995.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed an identical resolution earlier last week.

Israel honors U.S. veterans

Israel honored five U.S. veterans for their roles in liberating a concentration camp during World War II.

The medals awarded last Friday at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust came in recognition of the soldiers' efforts in liberating the Gunsirichen concentration camp in Austria.

The medals given to Raymond Callanan, Mickey Dorsey, Maynard Hanson, Robert Patton and Lynn LaBarre, the latter of which was given posthumously, were awarded at the suggestion of Miriam Griver-Meisels, the president of Hadassah Israel, whose father was liberated from the camp.