



NEWS AT A GLANCE

Kemp's praise of Farrakhan draws sharp Jewish reaction

By Matthew Dorf

■ The executive committee of the Council of Jewish Federations unanimously approved a plan to merge the umbrella body with the United Jewish Appeal. The plan outlines a joint board and executive committee for the two organizations, which would maintain separate chief executive officers, but the details of carrying out a merger are being left to the two entities to craft. [Page 2]

■ Republican vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp brought about a storm of criticism for praising Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan's self-help philosophy as "wonderful" in an interview with the Boston Globe. Kemp made the comments after a rally last week in Harlem, where he shared the podium with a local Nation of Islam leader. [Page 1]

■ Palestinian leaders voiced disappointment after a session of the Joint Steering Monitoring Committee in Jericho and charged that the Israeli team, under former Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Dan Shomron, had no real mandate to negotiate. The Israeli side indicated that the committee would hold practical talks after the High Holidays. Meanwhile, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said he would meet next week with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. [Page 3]

■ Labor Party head Shimon Peres is said to be "furious" that Labor Knesset member Ehud Barak chose to announce his candidacy for Labor Party leader while Peres was in New York. But sources close to Peres predicted that the former prime minister would announce his withdrawal from politics at the party's convention next summer.

■ El Al Israel Airlines ordered a new \$1 million bomb-detection system for use at New York's John F. Kennedy international airport, it was reported. The system is the fourth that has been ordered by El Al.

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Republican vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp has found himself locked in a torrent of criticism for heaping praise on part of Louis Farrakhan's philosophy.

When asked in an interview published Sunday in the Boston Globe about his opinion of the Nation of Islam leader's self-help philosophy for the black community, Kemp said, "It's wonderful, it's wonderful," according to a transcript of the interview provided by the paper.

As Jewish Democrats pounced on Kemp for "cozying up to Farrakhan," the virulently anti-Semitic black leader, Jewish Republicans and Kemp's staff sought to downplay the significance of his comments.

Whether Kemp touched the third rail of politics — the one that could amount to political suicide for the Republicans — in the Jewish community by praising a Farrakhan policy may only be known on Election Day.

Kemp, who was careful to say in the interview that he does not endorse the Nation of Islam, also praised Farrakhan's Million Man March and the speech he delivered at the rally last year.

"That Million Man March was a celebration of responsible fatherhood, individual initiative, of not asking the government to do everything for you, and getting an opportunity to be the man that God meant you to be," Kemp said, noting that Farrakhan "quoted the Jewish Bible" more than the Koran.

"I would have liked to have been invited to speak," Kemp said.

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), a self-described Kemp supporter, said in a telephone interview that he "strongly disagrees" with the vice presidential candidate's assessment of Farrakhan.

"You can't separate the message from the messenger when the messenger is as evil as Louis Farrakhan," said King, one of Farrakhan's most vocal critics in Congress.

"Any positive statement helps Farrakhan," King said. "Kemp should not have done that."

The flare-up gave Jewish Democrats a new avenue to attack the Republican presidential ticket.

Ira Forman, the executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, attacked Kemp for "declaring peace in our time with Louis Farrakhan."

"It is surprising and disappointing that Kemp would choose to ally himself with Farrakhan," he said. "Kemp's attempt to take this into every ghetto and barrio has crossed the line of decency," Forman said, playing on part of Kemp's stump speech.

Aware of the potential backlash at the polls, the Dole-Kemp campaign went on the offensive to argue that Kemp's remarks "were sorely misrepresented."

"Jack Kemp embraces the message of personal responsibility. But the messenger can never be an anti-Semitic bigot," Kemp's spokeswoman, Alixe Glenn, said in a telephone interview, referring to Farrakhan.

'I'm going to set off rockets'

Previewing a message that Kemp was expected to bring in his address to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations' 40th anniversary gala Tuesday night, Glenn said, "Jack Kemp believes that racial, religious and ethnic reconciliation is our nation's highest cause and that any form of racism or bigotry or anti-Semitism must be eradicated at every turn."

In speaking to the Boston Globe, Kemp himself appeared aware that his comments might set off the very reaction that they have received.

"I'm going to set off rockets if this is taken out of context," he was quoted as saying in that interview. "But I think it's interesting that in America today, in the black community, more and more black church leaders are telling men to be responsible fathers and to be respectful of their wives and women."

Kemp, who has been reaching out to black voters on behalf of the Republican ticket, gave the interview to the Globe hours after addressing a

Because of Rosh Hashanah, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 16.

Harlem rally where he shared the stage with Conrad Muhammad, a local Nation of Islam leader.

Muhammad "just happened to be there" and "definitely was not invited" by the campaign, Glenn said.

Jewish Republicans chalked up the controversy to "political posturing on the part of the Democrats," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, the Republican Jewish group.

"Clearly Kemp's remarks can be distorted for political gains by Democrats," Brooks said. But he also acknowledged that Farrakhan could also "use this for his own political gain."

And that is a real danger, according to the NJDC's Forman. "Jack Kemp is providing Farrakhan with respectability and legitimacy," he said.

While the organized Jewish community tends to lay low during election seasons, the Anti-Defamation League criticized Kemp, calling his comments "disappointing."

"Farrakhan's appeals to responsibility and independence merely sugarcoat a message that is bigoted and divisive to the core," ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, wrote in a letter to the editor at the Boston Globe.

"Louis Farrakhan's views are a package deal," Foxman continued. "As constructive as his 'self-help philosophy' may appear, it cannot be separated from the remainder of his vitriolic message." □

CJF, UJA partnership plan gathers steam at quarterly

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — A partnership plan that would join the United Jewish Appeal with the Council of Jewish Federations gathered steam during the CJF's quarterly meeting this week in Chicago.

As evidence, the two bodies immediately will begin looking for office space to share, they will "merge back-office operations wherever possible" and they will "look at redeployment of personnel where duplication appears to exist," said Dr. Conrad Giles, the CJF's president-designate.

In a telephone interview from Chicago, Giles said the CJF's executive committee Tuesday unanimously approved a plan that outlines a joint board and executive committee for the two bodies, which would maintain separate chief executive officers.

The CJF is the umbrella organization for local federations, which run an annual joint campaign with the UJA that raises about \$720 million.

Each federation decides how much of its share to keep at home to meet local needs and funnels the rest to the UJA for distribution to Israel and elsewhere overseas.

The new partnership idea replaced an earlier plan to merge the two entities along with the United Israel Appeal, which funnels campaign money to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The merger plan was rejected in the spring in part for being too radical and not reflecting broad enough consultation with the communities.

Both proposals were authored by a national committee that has been studying the restructuring of the Jewish fund-raising establishment for nearly three years.

The committee aimed to devise a system that would be more efficient and responsive to the changing needs of the Jewish community. That committee disbanded over the weekend in Chicago after officially recommending the new partnership plan.

The new plan's most conspicuous feature is the absence of details, which are being left to the two entities to craft, after which the organizations' two boards must give their final approval.

The new plan is expected ultimately to result in a full merger, but adopts a more gradual approach than the original proposal.

The new plan also reflects a sensitivity to some of the UJA's concerns with the earlier approach that its ability to advocate for overseas needs could not be assured and that federations' increasing emphasis on keeping the money at home would dominate.

The new plan offers a "comfort level" to the UJA that the defunct plan did not, said Joel Tauber, co-chairman of the restructuring committee and honorary national chairman of the UJA, whose board of trustees approved the partnership idea in Chicago.

Half of both the newly proposed joint board and executive committee would be made up of federation representatives; the other half would be filled with UJA-appointed representatives.

But nothing is firm and fast.

"If they don't like it," said Tauber, "UJA can call the partnership off at any time" and "stay in business" as is.

Under the old plan, some in the UJA had felt they were "giving up ownership" of the system because after four years, 50 percent of the governing board would be directly elected by the federations and the rest theoretically "could have ended up being federation people" as well, Tauber said.

But the details of the new configuration and its workings deliberately have been left in the air.

"The committee has now placed the ball in the courts of the two organizations," said Giles. "The plan will serve as a road map and will undoubtedly undergo modification."

The endeavor, according to Giles, will be guided by the bottom line that "to be maximally efficient, we can't afford two addresses in the national system."

The gradual approach to a unified system, he said, will allow for "a sense of trust to develop between all the parties."

But conflicts remain to be ironed out.

For one, there is disagreement over where a strategic plan for the system should fit into the partnership process.

That was most evident in a meeting during the quarterly of big-city federation representatives, who triggered the restructuring initiative in the first place.

The day before the meeting of the CJF executive, the big-city group split in a 9-5 vote, with the majority choosing to form a partnership first and then to devise a strategic plan to inform and guide the new entity, according to officials involved.

The dissenters, including executives from Boston, Cleveland, Atlanta and Los Angeles, argued that serious self-study, or a strategic plan, should occur at the same time as the partnership is being forged.

For his part, Giles believes that "there is consensus on the need for a strategic plan, just a difference in timing." □

Israeli ambassador gets to work

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — One week after arriving here to serve as Israel's top diplomat in the United States, Ambassador Eliahu Ben-Elissar escorted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to the Oval Office for a meeting with President Clinton.

Ben-Elissar, the 64-year-old former ambassador to Egypt, sent copies of his credentials to the State Department last week and will formally present them to Clinton at the end of the month. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Netanyahu remains elusive in approach to peace process***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has succeeded once again in keeping everyone guessing.

This week, in his second trip to Washington after assuming office three months ago, Netanyahu left his American hosts, his public back home, and his partners and rivals in the Mideast peace process all wondering what his declared policy of "peace with security" really means.

His detractors say he does not know; his supporters say all will unfold in due time.

Meanwhile, he continues to pronounce deliberately vague, tantalizingly attractive statements that suffice to beat back pressures from the right and left, at home and abroad, at least for the present.

Faced with mounting pressure from the United States to advance the peace process with the Palestinians, Netanyahu sought this week to focus attention on finding a formula to resume the talks with Syria that were suspended in March after Damascus failed to condemn a series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel.

On the eve of his meeting Monday with President Clinton, the BBC World Service reported from Washington on the Israeli leader's bold new "concession" toward Syria, with the correspondent wondering how it would go over with hard-liners in Netanyahu's governing coalition. The "concession" was Netanyahu's apparent readiness to compromise on the Golan Heights, which Syria wants returned as part of any eventual peace deal with Israel.

Indeed, in on-board briefings to reporters accompanying him on the flight over the Atlantic, the prime minister pointedly refused to rule out the prospect of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan — a proposition he has until now vigorously opposed.

Instead, he restated his desire to resume the talks with Syria "without preconditions" on either side.

But once in Washington, Netanyahu said he wanted to negotiate with Syria and emerge "with us holding the Golan" — apparently putting a damper on the BBC-type speculation regarding a dramatic shift in his thinking.

'A forum can be found'

His hourlong meeting with the president passed, it seems, without dramatic incident.

Netanyahu stressed his wish to resume the talks with Damascus, and the two leaders agreed that their experts would try to draft a formula to bring about the talks' resumption while taking account of the widely disparate Israeli and Syrian positions.

Netanyahu's foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, and the State Department's top Mideast troubleshooter, Dennis Ross, promptly set about this delicate assignment.

If Syrian President Hafez Assad is "interested in negotiating peace, then I'm sure a forum can be found," Netanyahu told reporters after meeting Clinton. It is "crucial" for neither Israel nor Syria to try to "nail the other side to fixed positions to enter the negotiations."

The Syrians say they are ready to resume negotiations — but only at the point at which the talks with the defeated Labor-led government broke off earlier this year.

That point, according to unconfirmed accounts, consisted of a "hypothetical" discussion in which a full withdrawal from the Golan was posited — though not concretely pledged — and the talks focused on security arrangements and the normalization of relations.

The prime minister, emphasizing that no written agreements were reached, says his government is not bound

by the talks Syria had with the previous Israeli administration.

The Israeli team — when and if the talks are resumed — will be led now by the new ambassador to Washington, former Likud Knesset member Eliahu Ben-Elissar, who replaced the former Labor-appointed ambassador, Itamar Rabinovich.

Netanyahu's same strategy of stressing the desire in principle to negotiate while maintaining a cautious approach regarding the substance of those talks was also clearly discernible this week on the Palestinian track.

During his 12 hours in Washington on Monday, Netanyahu met with Clinton, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense William Perry.

U.S. officials speaking on the condition of anonymity said Netanyahu touted his government's recent moves, including his own meeting last week with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and highlighted that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resumed face-to-face meetings this week for the first time since his May election.

Christopher joined with Clinton in delivering to Netanyahu the message that the United States wants to see progress on the Palestinian track — particularly a quick resolution to the long-delayed turnover of most of the West Bank town of Hebron to the Palestinians.

The redeployment, originally scheduled for late March, was postponed indefinitely by the previous Labor government after a series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel. Palestinians have looked to implementation of the redeployment as a test of goodwill by the Netanyahu government regarding the peace process.

But, after the Netanyahu's breakthrough meeting with Arafat at the Israel-Gaza border, momentum slowed on the Palestinian track.

Monday's meeting of the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Steering and Monitoring Committee was largely procedural, with the two sides only agreeing on the shape of their future agenda. Palestinian leaders voiced disappointment after the session, charging that the Israeli team, under former Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Dan Shomron, had no real mandate to negotiate.

Breathe new life into accords

In reality, the Palestinian track probably will remain in limbo until after the Jewish holidays, which end in a month.

Some Israeli observers say the real crunch will come even later — after the U.S. presidential election. If Clinton is re-elected, these observers predict, he will launch a vigorous effort to breathe new life into the Palestinian self-rule accords and to get the talks with Syria to focus on substance. That will be the moment, say these observers, when Netanyahu's way with words will no longer suffice and he will have to be more specific in his policies.

Yoel Markus, a columnist for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, wrote Tuesday that at the end of the day, Netanyahu's chief concern would be to "succeed, succeed and succeed." To succeed, that is, in his present term of office and thus to succeed in winning a second four years.

At the moment, Markus wrote, Netanyahu seems to be all things to all men, scattering contradictory and unattainable promises.

"But no one knows better than he that war or terrorism, brought on by diplomatic deep-freeze with the Palestinians and the Syrians, will be considered a dire failure and will destroy him in the eyes of the electorate."

"Do not belittle the power of [his] ambition," Markus urged his readers. "And, above all, don't make him out an idiot." □

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

Clinton denies being soft on Israel for Jewish votes*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton is shooting back at critics who have charged that his administration has taken a soft line with Israel because of fear of alienating American Jewish voters.

Responding to a reporter's question about the charge before meeting Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Clinton said, "That's wrong."

As the president stiffened in his chair in the Oval Office and took a more serious tone, he said, "We are not interested in making rhetorical points one way or the other."

"We're interested in trying to bring about peace with security for all the people in the Middle East," he continued.

Some Arab Americans and Middle East policy specialists have challenged that the administration is shrinking from criticizing Israel's expansion of settlements to avoid a potential backlash from Jewish voters on Election Day.

When Israeli troops last month helped to move trailers into the West Bank to expand some settlements, the administration did not oppose the action and instead repeatedly told reporters that U.S. policy on settlements had not changed.

The State Department has long called settlements "a complicating factor" in the peace process.

The administration has, however, expressed concern about the delayed Israeli redeployment from most of the West Bank town of Hebron.

And over the weekend, Secretary of State Warren Christopher urged Israel to take new "concrete steps" to advance Middle East peace.

A State Department spokesman, Glyn Davies, rejected charges that the administration's policy was motivated by concerns about the Jewish vote.

In defending his administration, Clinton said, "The role of the United States should be to encourage the peace process and to minimize the risks of those who take the risk for peace."

"Different governments may have different ways of pursuing the peace process," Clinton said Tuesday.

"The only way we can be effective is to work with the elected" government of the Jewish state, the president also said. □

Peres, on U.S. visit, cautions against slowing peace process*By Cynthia Mann*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said this week that he welcomed as a "necessary step" the recent meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

"It could have happened before," he said, "but better later than never."

Peres cautioned against slowing down the peace process, saying that the meeting between the Israeli prime minister and Palestinian leader should be followed up with a fulfillment of the self-rule accords, including a timely redeployment of Israeli troops from most of Hebron.

Peres, reflective and looking rested, made the comments Monday before the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

It was the same day that Ehud Barak, foreign minister under Peres, declared his candidacy for Labor Party leader.

Peres has not decided whether to run again for the post in June's party elections.

Former Ministers Ephraim Sneh and Haim Ramon are also expected to seek the party chairmanship.

Meanwhile, Peres urged against wasting time in the pursuit of peace with Syria, saying, "The Jewish people don't have as much time as we might think."

He said a host of "borderless" dangers loom, including terrorism, non-conventional weapons and fundamentalist groups.

Peres broke off talks with Damascus in early March after Syrian President Hafez Assad refused to condemn a series of Hamas suicide bombings in the Jewish state.

His meeting with the U.S. Jewish leaders in New York came on the day that Netanyahu met with President Clinton at the White House to discuss ways to restart the Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

Peres said it was unrealistic to expect that peace with Syria would be achieved without a cost.

"I don't believe Assad will satisfy himself with a lesser price" than was paid to Egypt, he said, referring to the return of the Sinai as part of the Camp David accords.

Asked to reflect on his loss in May's elections, he called politics "a risky business" and indicated that he had few regrets.

The former prime minister spoke of pride in having "revolutionized the situation" and said one must "choose either to be popular" or to be "controversial and serve the future."

He also said he saw no reason why opposition party members should refrain from publicly expressing their views when outside Israel.

There is no need to lobby the U.S. government on the peace process, he added.

"The United States of America, for reasons of her own, is deeply interested in the peace process," he said. "It's a policy without an alternative." □

Olmert's Knesset immunity hinders effort to indict him*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair has decided to seek an indictment against Jerusalem Mayor and Likud Knesset member Ehud Olmert on charges of fraud and misappropriation in connection with funding for his party in the 1988 Knesset election campaign.

The decision Sunday came after a special hearing, granted in certain cases involving public figures, during which Olmert and his attorney, Yigal Arnon, sought to convince Ben-Yair to drop the charges.

The indictment accuses Olmert of trying to mislead the state comptroller by covering up donations already received by the Likud, in an effort to receive additional state treasury funds for the election campaign, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The attorney general said in his written decision that other Likud election campaign officials had been indicted in connection with the same financial irregularities and that charges would be brought against other party officials.

Prosecuting Olmert would prove that all are equal before the law, Ben-Yair wrote.

The attorney general asked the Knesset House Committee to begin deliberations to remove Olmert's parliamentary immunity so that he could be prosecuted.

Arnon said his client was innocent, but that he would fight against the loss of immunity because a legal action could drag on for years. □