



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### AIPAC criticizes Iran loan

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee criticized a decision by the World Bank to approve a \$231 million loan to Iran. AIPAC said "the lives of 13 innocent Iranian Jews are at stake, and this vote sends exactly the wrong message at the wrong time."

### U.S. urged on Hamas militant

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations urged President Clinton to pressure the Palestinian Authority to transfer a Hamas militant to the United States for prosecution.

Reports say Palestinian security officials arrested Mohammed Deif, who tops Israel's most-wanted list and is believed responsible for the deaths of at least five American Jews. Palestinian officials have refused to confirm the arrest.

### Bush, Gore to meet with Barak

Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush is scheduled to have a private meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in Washington on Tuesday.

The Texas governor plans to discuss the Middle East peace process and what the U.S. commitment to Israel would be like under a Bush administration, said a Bush spokesman. Vice President Al Gore will also be meeting with Barak, and all three plan to speak at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee annual public policy conference next week.

### UJC trims budget by \$1 million

The new umbrella organization for North America's Jewish federations is circulating to its members a \$41.7 million budget proposal for next year.

The United Jewish Communities' budget plan trimmed slightly less than \$1 million from this year's budget, which is less than many federation leaders had expected. The UJC's board of trustees is slated to approve a final version of the budget by mid-June.

### U.S. supports pantyhose interests

President Clinton signed into law a trade bill that includes a provision protecting U.S. imports of Israeli nylon used mainly to make pantyhose. The provision protecting the \$50 million in imports was added to the trade bill with African and Caribbean countries after lobbying from pro-Israel groups in Washington.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### JCCs strive to add community to business of pools and schools

By Julie Wiener

BOSTON (JTA) — A staff "buddy system," a message board for commemorating happy occasions and condolences, and a few new chairs outside a nursery school entrance may not seem like revolutionary developments at your local Jewish community center.

But for the JCCs of Greater Boston, these are some of the components of a new effort that they — and the larger national JCC movement — are describing as a fundamental shift in the way they do business.

The aim is to foster connections and networks among members as a way to create stronger ties within Jewish life.

This is not the first conceptual shift in American JCCs, which were founded largely to acculturate newly arrived Jewish immigrants and have long been known primarily for their three "core businesses": gym facilities, early childhood programs and day camps.

In the past decade, in an effort many described as "putting the J back in JCC," the centers have sought to beef up their Jewish content. Guided by their umbrella group, the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America, JCCs have hired Judaic educators, sponsored adult Jewish education courses and enriched the Jewish curriculum of the nursery schools.

Now, seizing upon research findings that show many American Jews live far from their families and the Jewish neighborhoods of yore and — like many Americans — are yearning for a greater feeling of community, the centers' new focus could be described as "putting the community back in the JCC."

"Meaningful Jewish Community" was the theme of the movement's biennial convention in Boston last week.

JCC leaders from 130 centers around the country gathered in small groups to talk about just what community means and how the centers can do a better job facilitating connections among their members.

An estimated 1 million American Jews are members of 206 JCCs around the country, and another million attend occasional programs. Approximately 2 million belong to a synagogue, according to the 1990 population study conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations.

Social activist and syndicated Jewish columnist Leonard Fein kicked off the biennial with a keynote address outlining the new approach.

"Bigger pools and better early childhood education programs are important, but they are not how we'll be measured," he said.

"We can't be satisfied to remain in health and hobbies, as important as they are. If that's all there is, the center becomes a cafeteria with only appetizers and desserts."

Fein is one of the authors of a study commissioned by the Boston JCCs calling on the centers to see their services as "effective means to generate the numerous relationships and feelings of attachment that are at the heart of well-functioning intimate communities of Jews."

Steven Cohen, another author of the study and a professor of sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said, "In the past, JCCs used to reflect the community. Now they're about creating community."

The initiative comes at the same time that American synagogues — through new initiatives like Synagogue 2000, the Reform movement's Experiment in Congregational

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Report: Israel has Jerusalem plan

Israel will propose carving out "Palestinian quarters" in Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty when peace talks resume in Stockholm, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The proposal would include the creation of an umbrella municipality, headed by a Jewish mayor, with Arab and Jewish deputy mayors responsible for their respective populations.

### Plan to bomb Arafat HQ denied

Political sources in Jerusalem told Israel Radio that Israel threatened to bomb Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters if Palestinians did not stop firing on Israeli forces during unrest in the territories this week.

But the head of the Israel Defense Force's central command said the report is inaccurate.

### Soldiers wounded in Lebanon

Three Israeli soldiers were wounded, two of them seriously, after Hezbollah gunmen fired on an Israeli outpost in southern Lebanon.

Troops inside Israeli territory also came under attack Thursday. Israel responded with airstrikes on Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon.

### Evacuation follows radiation fear

Israel evacuated its embassy in Belarus and called the staff home for medical checks.

The move came after wild fires in Ukraine stirred up radiation remaining from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and raised radiation levels in Belarus.

### Kibbutz unemployment rising

Unemployment on many kibbutzim in Israel is rising, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The paper said the trend is in part the result of the privatization of many kibbutzim during the past decade.

Education and a new philanthropic partnership of mega-donors Michael Steinhardt and Edgar Bronfman called Synagogue Transformation and Renewal — are also talking about making themselves more welcoming, and more vibrant, communities.

At the biennial here, JCC leaders repeatedly emphasized that they want to cooperate, not compete, with synagogues and that many JCC members are also active in their synagogues. However, proponents of the initiative note that when it comes to building community and reaching out to the unaffiliated, JCCs can fill a niche that religious institutions cannot.

The JCC "cuts across all categories of Jewish life," said Sherry Israel, a professor at Brandeis University's Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service and one of the authors of the "Meaningful Jewish Community" study.

"When we did research, people were saying, 'I like the JCC because no one is judging me there and I can't do anything wrong.' For some Jews, the barriers in other institutions are more formidable than many people realize."

Although to some JCC leaders, the initiative sounds like a marketing spin on things they are already trying to do, proponents say it is not just a new gloss on business as usual. Burt Garr, executive director of the JCC of Greater St. Paul, Minn., said when he first learned of the new initiative, he thought, "Gee whiz, that's already happening," but later decided the new effort is significant because it is about being proactive.

"This is not just about customer service," said Fiona Epstein, director of Boston's Leventhal-Sidman JCC, a bustling Jewish center in the affluent suburb of Newton.

Rather, said Epstein and others involved, it is about taking "naturally occurring communities" — the friendships that often develop among parents in a nursery school class, for example — and actively promoting them, while encouraging participants to deepen their Jewish commitment.

"We want a relationship with members, to see members not as customers or a commodity," said Epstein, adding that the variety of classes offered "are not just about making money or giving skills but building relationships."

Such concepts are much more abstract than the traditional issues with which JCCs have concerned themselves, like swimming pools and building expansions.

On a concrete level, the initiative in Boston, begun last year and being promoted nationally, is so far focusing on small changes.

It is working to convince staff to buy into the idea while strengthening community among nursery school parents.

New staff now get "buddies" to show them the ropes and mentor them, and all staff participate in periodic social events, such as a Passover "chametz blowout," when they wipe out all the non-Passover products.

"For staff to help create community with members they need to be part of a community, too," said Alan Mann, executive vice president of the JCCs of Greater Boston.

In the Striar JCC, in a suburb south of Boston, changes are still in the beginning stages.

Chairs placed in the center's small lobby are periodically filled with people stopping to chat, and a bulletin board for mazel tovs and condolences is prominently displayed. In addition, nursery school staff have worked closely with a graduate student in Jewish communal service to create more opportunities for parents to get to know each other and learn more about Judaism.

A school-wide membership directory lists hobbies, to encourage families to get together outside school. At parents' request, the school offered a session for parents on Jewish mourning practices and helped create a babysitting co-op for families to use on days the school is closed.

It remains to be seen whether the ideals and theories of the "Meaningful Jewish Community" initiative take hold nationally, or even reach their lofty goals in Boston.

Susan Shevitz, director of Brandeis' Hornstein Program, described the effort as "profoundly important," but questioned whether any institutions, including JCCs, can fulfill peoples' yearning for community while also recognizing American Jews' "powerful need for individualism."

"We live in a consumer environment and to change from being a customer to a member to a chevra is hard," she said, using the Hebrew term for community. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Accused shooter won't stand trial

A judge in Pennsylvania ruled that the man accused of killing five minorities, including one Jewish woman, last month near Pittsburgh is incompetent to stand trial. Doctors will report in 90 days on the mental state of Richard Scott Baumhammers, who was transferred to a state hospital for treatment.

If his condition improves, Baumhammers could face trial at a later date.

### Austria names restitution official

Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel appointed the country's former ambassador to the United Nations to oversee negotiations regarding Holocaust-era restitution claims.

Schuessel appointed Ernst Sucharipa after the United States called on Austria earlier in the week to settle a broad range of restitution issues.

### Dutch insurers fail to pay up

California officials have failed to collect \$4.2 million pledged by Dutch insurance companies for a humanitarian fund to aid needy Holocaust survivors residing in the state.

State Insurance Commissioner Chuck Quackenbush and the three companies — Aegon, ING and Fortis — announced the agreement last December, but no plans have been put forward to obtain and distribute the money.

### Coalition rallies for foreign aid

A broad coalition of groups including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee rallied Wednesday at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in support of foreign aid.

The Campaign to Preserve U.S. Global Leadership lobbied on Capitol Hill and urged lawmakers to fully fund the Clinton administration's foreign aid budget.

### Neo-Nazi party forms in Lithuania

Some 135 people founded a neo-Nazi party in Lithuania, according to reports in the Lithuanian media. The party, which is said to have some 700 members, promotes the rights of people of Baltic origin in its charter.

### 'Jewish Love Boat' to sail

A Jewish singles cruise to be chaperoned next week by "Kosher Sex" Rabbi Shmuley Boteach sold out all of its 60 slots.

The "Jewish Love Boat," as it's being called, will cruise from Vancouver to Alaska. Boteach was named matchmaker-in-chief by [www.iDate.com](http://www.iDate.com), a Jewish singles site sponsoring the cruise.

## Mandela's remarks on Iran cost him honor by Jewish group

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela, who was to be honored this week by the American Jewish Committee for his support of Israel and fight for human rights, came away empty-handed.

The AJCommittee canceled the Thursday luncheon after Mandela, in front of a Jewish audience, earlier this week stood by his remarks that the ongoing espionage trial of 13 Iranian Jews is "free and fair" and that the West has no business meddling in what he contends is a purely domestic affair.

Governments, human rights groups and Jewish leaders around the globe have condemned Iran for what is seen as an undemocratic political show trial.

Mandela, 82, who crusaded for decades against South Africa's apartheid system and later became the country's first black president, has enjoyed warm relations with South Africa's Jewish community and worked closely with Jews within his movement.

However, today he appears to be the only high-profile figure in the world to have spoken out in favor of Iran on the issue.

His stance has mystified many, including one American Jewish activist lobbying for the release of the Iranian Jewish prisoners.

"It's very disturbing," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

For "someone of his standing, his comments carry weight in the international community," Hoenlein said. "I don't believe anyone with the full information about the nature of this trial could think it's being conducted fairly."

Mandela has been a longtime supporter of states such as Iran, Libya and Cuba.

This troika, while pariahs to much of the world and notorious for routinely trampling on the human rights of their own people, lent their support to Mandela and his anti-apartheid struggle during his 27 years in prison.

Last October, Mandela visited Iran to promote bilateral relations between the two countries. On his ensuing trip to Israel, Mandela told Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy that Iranian officials had assured him the Jewish prisoners were being treated well and would be tried fairly.

Levy reportedly responded that if Mandela had received similar quality legal defense, "it is doubtful" whether he "would be here today."

On Monday, Levy, in New York for meetings at the United Nations, met with Mandela to discuss the "Iran 13."

Shortly after the trial of the 13 began this month, Iranian news agencies quoted Mandela as giving his stamp of approval to the proceedings.

The trial has been held behind closed doors away from international observers, with lawyers appointed by the hard-line fundamentalist courts, and with no hard evidence supplied by the prosecution, say American Jewish advocates for the 13.

On Monday, Mandela was in New York speaking before the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

When members of the audience asked him to clarify his views, Mandela stood by his earlier statements, according to some who attended the event.

He also said he had been asked by prominent people, including former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Mary Robinson, the top U.N. human rights official, to intervene on behalf of the Iran 13. During his visit to Iran in October, he said, he raised the issue with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who gave him an "honest briefing." Mandela told the audience that he did not want to play into the hands of Iran's hard-liners by publicly pressing them.

The reaction to Monday's remarks was swift. Invitees to the AJCommittee luncheon in Washington were e-mailed that the luncheon had been canceled.

"It's been postponed, but I can't say it's been rescheduled because we don't have a date yet," said AJCommittee spokesman Kenneth Bandler.

Bandler declined to say why. But a Mandela spokesman was later quoted as saying Mandela believed it was because of his pro-Iran statements. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

**Where is the Jewish voice  
in issue of China trade status?**

By Eric Fingerhut  
*Washington Jewish Week*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Most of the Jewish community remains strangely silent in the debate over the possibility of the United States granting permanent normal trade relations to China — despite consistent reports of religious persecution in the world's most populous country.

Only the Jewish Labor Committee has come out against granting permanent trade privileges to China; other Jewish organizations have not taken any positions, even though the organized Jewish community generally weighs in on major issues on Capitol Hill.

Representatives of those organizations say the complexity of the issue and the impossibility of being involved in every issue contribute to the Jewish community's relative silence.

But critics ask: If Jewish groups are not willing to help when other religions are persecuted, how can they expect help when Jews are persecuted?

The granting of the relations — the vote is slated for next week — would permanently give China's exports the same access to United States markets as products from most other nations.

Currently, China's trade status is reviewed annually by Congress.

Much of the opposition on the trade status comes from those who object to China's poor treatment of workers and the environment.

But a significant portion of opponents object to the human rights situation in China, specifically the country's repression of Christians and Buddhists and its crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

A United States Commission on International Religious Freedom report, released earlier this month, documents the religious persecution and recommends that the United States should grant the trade status to China only if it makes "substantial improvement" to religious freedom.

The commission's chair, Rabbi David Saperstein, said 1999 was "disastrous" and "the worst year for religious freedom in China since the Cultural Revolution."

The commission, he said, believed it needed to outline some steps toward improvement that the United States could demand of China in this area before normalized trade relations were implemented.

Those conditions include the release of all religious prisoners and "unhindered access" by the commission and international human rights organizations to all religious leaders in China, including those imprisoned, detained or under house arrest.

Ongoing religious persecution in China is one reason the Jewish Labor Committee is opposed to granting the Chinese the trade status.

The group also cites China's poor record on worker rights issues.

Granting China "this kind of access to our markets sends the wrong message," said Avram Lyon, the JLC's executive director. "Pressure comes when people refuse to do business with them."

But major Jewish organizations, including the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism that Saperstein directs, have been quiet on the issue.

Asked why, an official at one national Jewish organization, suspected it was a matter of priorities. "You have to focus" on certain issues, he said.

"You can't do everything."

Saperstein said the issue was discussed at two meetings of the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action, but the "complexity" of the economic and trade issues involved, as well as a lack of consensus on the best way — engagement or pressure — to encourage change in China precluded an agreement.

He also noted that with "8,000 pieces of legislation" each year in Congress, "no one organization can take a position on all of them."

Saperstein emphasized, though, that the center and other Jewish groups have spoken out against religious persecution in China.

The organization's Web site lists religious persecution as one of its more than 60 issue areas, although it does not show much recent activity — such as statements or press releases — on the issue other than details of Saperstein's work with the religious freedom commission.

Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and the other Jewish member of the religious freedom commission, is surprised by the Jewish community's lack of activism on this issue.

Abrams suspects that one reason may be that the split among the traditional allies of the Jewish community, with the Clinton administration and other Democrats supporting granting the status but many in the labor and environmental camps opposing it, makes it difficult for Jewish groups to take a side.

Abrams acknowledges that because the religious freedom of the few Jews in China is not threatened, the issue would not be at the top the Jewish community's political agenda.

But, he asked, "Should it not be an issue at all ... because Jews are not suffering?"

"You can't get away with the position that religious freedom of Jews," such as the 13 Jews on trial in Iran, "is important, but Jews don't have to be concerned with the religious freedom of Christians and Buddhists," Abrams said.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, the founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, also believes the Jewish community should focus more efforts on religious persecution in China.

Eckstein, who visited China in 1998, was invited to return last fall by the country's religious affairs bureau.

But he canceled the trip, saying he feared his visit would be "used as a showpiece" by the Chinese government instead of an opportunity to "establish positive dialogue."

Eckstein would prefer that the United States keep the annual review of China's trade status in place instead of making normal trade relations permanent because, he says, it "keeps China on its toes."

And he sees trade relations with China as a "Jewish issue," both morally and pragmatically.

"If we don't stand up for religious liberty when others are affected, then we can't expect others to stand up for religious liberty when Jews are affected," he said. □