

IN THE NEWS

State wants money to show Israel policy

The United States wants \$25 million to explain its policies to the Muslim world.

In the proposed 2004 national budget, the State Department cites the Arab-Israeli conflict as an area of divergence.

The program, "Partnerships for Learning," is the "dominant theme" of its cultural exchange strategy.

Peres open to unity government

Shimon Peres hinted that he could take Israel's Labor Party into a government coalition.

Political sources on Tuesday quoted Peres telling party colleagues that he would support implementation of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to evacuate most settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Analysts said such sentiments paved the way for Labor to form a national unity government with Sharon's Likud Party if current right-wing coalition partners walk out to protest a settler evacuation. On Tuesday, the National Religious Party threatened to do just that.

Israel to make a demographic swap?

Israel would consider putting some Arab citizens under Palestinian jurisdiction in any peace accord.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office on Tuesday suggested that a future Palestinian state would include some areas of the Galilee, where some 250,000 Israeli Arabs live.

In return, Israel effectively would annex some Jewish settlement blocs in the West Bank.

Many Israeli Jews fear that the high Arab birthrate threatens the Jewish state's demographic character. Many Israeli Arabs have become increasingly pro-Palestinian, but are reluctant to give up the political and economic benefits of life in Israel.

WORLD REPORT

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As Sen. Lieberman falters, Jews look for a new candidate

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The political landscape has shifted in the Democratic primary race, and Jewish donors are watching.

The decline of Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), the first viable Jewish candidate for president, has left many Jewish fund-raisers and donors without a candidate and has sparked a new round of fund-raising calls and solicitations.

Much of the discussion focuses on Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who has emerged as the front-runner after victories in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. Like Lieberman, Kerry is a political veteran who has cultivated deep ties with the Jewish community both in and out of his home state.

But there is talk that some pro-Israel backers will look to Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), a newcomer to the political scene, believing that he would take a more pro-Israel stance.

There also is some speculation that Lieberman backers, supportive of some of the lawmaker's more conservative positions, may consider supporting President Bush.

Lieberman's poor showing in New Hampshire — he chose not to compete in Iowa — has many people writing his campaign's obituary. Terry McAuliffe, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, has said that any candidate who didn't win a state outright on Tuesday — when seven states held primaries — should drop out of the race, and Lieberman has established that as his benchmark to continue.

But some Jewish donors say their peers

have been reconsidering their support for Lieberman for weeks, since it became clear that the favorite son was slipping out of the top tier of candidates.

There is no empirical data on the amount of Jewish money in Democratic politics because the Federal Elections Committee does not ask for a contributor's religion.

By all accounts, however, Jewish donors have played a significant role in bankrolling Democratic operations.

While Lieberman has never enjoyed full support from the Jewish community, many of those who backed Lieberman are expected to assess their next moves soon.

"I don't think all of the Jewish money will go to one of the candidates; it will go to the best candidate based on the individual contributors' thinking," said Marvin Lender, a member of Lieberman's campaign board, who raised funds in the Jewish community. "I think that Jews are not single-issue voters and continuously will look for the best candidate."

Many of the major political players in Democratic politics, including prominent Jews, gave large donations to Lieberman and other candidates. Others have given small donations to numerous hopefuls, and may now choose one candidate to whom they will give the maximum donation. Under new campaign finance laws, donors can give up to \$2,000 to a single candidate and up to \$37,500 total for candidates for president, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Lonnie Kaplan, a Lieberman fund-raiser in New Jersey and past president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee,

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AMERICA
DECIDES

■ Lieberman's supporters will look elsewhere, including to President Bush

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suggested that if Lieberman drops out of the race many of his backers would pause before backing another candidate.

"People will look at two things — where do they stand in terms of issues of Israel's security, and is there still a race?" he said.

Some believe Kerry has the race sewn up. That might lead some Jewish donors, who want to be part of a winning team, to give to him, but others many feel their donations are therefore less necessary.

Alan Solomont, a fund-raiser for Kerry in the Jewish community, said there would not be a push for Jewish money now but that the campaign would continue to make inroads in the community. "As the dynamics in the race have changed, people and their campaigns have signed on to others," he said. "I think John Kerry will likely pick up some of these folks."

Some supporters of Israel say Kerry has a solid voting record on Mideast issues, but there are lingering concerns that as president he might pressure Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians, as former President Clinton did.

That's likely to throw some support toward Edwards, who placed well in Iowa and may get a bounce from a victory Tuesday in South Carolina.

Lender said that Gen. Wesley Clark — who has Jewish roots — may find that it helps him raise Jewish money, though his campaign is struggling.

Steve Rabinowitz, a Democratic media

strategist with strong ties in the Jewish community, said he believes Kerry could be helped by the fact that many of Lieberman's supporters were more liberal than their candidate, but wanted to back a fellow Jew. "Professional givers will get on board real fast," Rabinowitz said. "The people they raise the money from will be a little slower."

Little of the Lieberman support is expected to go to former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean. Dean had poor showings in both Iowa and New Hampshire and has been hurt in the Jewish community by e-mails highlighting misstatements advocating a more "even-handed" U.S. policy between Israel and the Palestinians.

However, Steve Grossman, the national co-chairman of the Dean campaign and a former AIPAC president and DNC chairman, said he believes damage control efforts following the e-mail campaign could result in new Jewish donations if Dean regains momentum in the next two weeks.

"There will be a considerable number of fund-raisers who are Jewish, particularly those who have been close to Al Gore, who very much like and respect what Howard Dean has done to energize the Democratic Party," Grossman said. "Those people will take a hard look at

Howard Dean but will want to see the Dean campaign regain momentum, from a political standpoint, between now and the Wisconsin primary on Feb. 17."

Grossman said he believes many Jews back Dean, but they are not necessarily Jewish community leaders or others identified specifically by their religion.

Kaplan, the Lieberman fund-raiser, said he believed some backers would give a second look to Bush rather than support a different Democratic challenger.

"After the Democrats have nominated a candidate, people in the Jewish community will look at the two candidates," Kaplan said. "Many Democrats who are Joe Lieberman supporters will compare the nominee to President Bush."

Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, agreed. "A natural part of the Lieberman constituency will be people who agree with a lot of the president's positions, particularly on national security."

But Solomont said he believed most of Lieberman's backers will stay in the Democratic Party.

"Jewish Democrats, although they have a relationship with Joe Lieberman, have a more strongly held desire to defeat George W. Bush," he said.

'Professional givers will get on board' to back Sen. John Kerry's campaign quickly.

Steve Rabinowitz
Democratic media consultant

French lawmakers debate ban

PARIS (JTA) —The French Parliament began debate on a government-sponsored bill to ban conspicuous religious symbols in state schools.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin on Tuesday opened the three-day debate in the National Assembly, in which some 150 legislators are scheduled to speak.

The bill, to be voted upon Feb. 10, is supported by most lawmakers from the governing UMP Party and the main opposition Socialist Party.

Most Jewish groups strongly support the measure.

The Central Consistoire, France's largest Jewish religious organization, says it accepts a ban on yarmulkes but doesn't think the issue should be legislated.

If the bill passes and is ratified by the Senate, religious symbols will become illegal in French public schools at beginning of the next school year.

Also in France, an Orthodox organization that runs the majority of synagogues in France and the chief rabbinate, quit the CRIF umbrella body of French Jews.

The director of the Central Consistoire, Frederic Attali, told JTA that his organization is demanding that its representation be increased to 50 percent of the CRIF council, "since we represent three-quarters of the membership in CRIF."

CRIF spokeswoman Edith Lenschner said the decision was "terrible," though she added that CRIF had not been informed officially of the move.

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In Gaza, settlers defiant after Sharon speaks

By DINA KRAFT

TEL KATIFA, Gaza Strip (JTA) — Amid the sea views, palm trees and barbed wire of the Gaza Strip's Jewish settlements, defiance is rising against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's announcement that he might dismantle most of the area's Jewish communities.

Speaking on the lawns of sprawling, multi-level houses or in trailers set on sandy slopes, residents say they will work to foil any attempt to make them move — but they won't fight against soldiers or police sent to remove them by force.

"If we have to evacuate, it will be with pain, but it won't be accompanied by violence," said Nurit Hendel, one of the original founders of Tel Katifa, a settlement of some 20 families on the Mediterranean coast.

Most settlers dismiss Sharon's plan to evacuate 17 of the strip's 20 Jewish settlements as just one of many failed plans that have come and gone since Jews began moving back to the area some 30 years ago.

In an interview Monday with the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, and then at a meeting of his own Likud Party, the prime minister said his goal was to remove most of the Jewish settlements from Gaza as part of his plan to unilaterally disengage from the Palestinians.

"The aim is to move settlements from places where they cause us problems or places where we won't remain in a permanent arrangement," Sharon told Ha'aretz.

Hendel — the daughter of Zvi Hendel, a legislator from the National Union bloc who has championed the rights of Gaza's Jews — grew up in the main bloc of settlements here, known as Gush Katif.

She remembers no other home and cannot fathom life anywhere but this arid, desert landscape by the beach, she says.

Barrages of mortar fire, shootings and roadside bombings since the Palestinian intifada began three years ago have put Gaza's settlements on the frontline — but the attacks haven't deterred Hendel or her neighbors.

Nor has sending her 7-year-old daughter to school in an armored convoy of soldiers.

On one edge of Hendel's settlement lies the Palestinian village of Dir el-Balah, and nearby is a small army outpost of

several dozen Israeli soldiers.

The soldiers guard the settlers, manning a gate and a watchtower that overlook the village.

A tank and an armored personnel carrier are perched on a bluff alongside their encampment.

Sharon's comments have prompted a political storm in Israel, with settlers urging right-wing allies in the Knesset to push for Sharon's overthrow.

"The residents of Gush Katif, with the active support of other partners from the national camp, will do all in their power, within the limits of the law, to bring an end to Ariel Sharon's term as prime minister," read a statement from the Gaza Coast Regional Council, which represents several settlements in the area.

Sharon's spokesman, Ra'anon Gissin, said the plan was not set in stone and that the picture could change if the Palestinian Authority became a viable partner in peace efforts — though it's doubtful the Palestinians would accept Israeli settlements in Gaza even under a formal peace agreement.

Gissin said the withdrawal plan was being put together on the chance that the Palestinian Authority might collapse soon, leaving Israel responsible for the fate of the Gaza Strip's roughly 1.5 million Palestinians.

"In the absence of any partner in the map for peace, we have to prepare a plan that will enable us to cut our losses," Gissin told JTA in a phone interview.

About 7,500 Jewish settlers live in the Gaza Strip.

Many are religious and claim the land as their biblical birthright.

Yigal Kirshenzaft, principal of a religious school for girls in the settlement of Atzmona, was among Jewish settlers evacuated from the Sinai settlement of Yamit in 1982 as part of Israel's peace accord with Egypt.

Abandoning Gaza settlements would be much more difficult, he says, because of the settlers' ideological and religious ties to this land.

"I don't think Jewish history would for-

give us" if there were an evacuation, says Kirshenzaft, who moved to the settlement of Neve Dekalim directly after Yamit was dismantled.

Last October, he and his wife were caught in a shooting attack along the main road that settlers use to reach Gush Katif. His wife was lightly injured, but Kirshenzaft says his family — which includes 12 children — is determined to stay.

"Throughout the history of Israel, people have laid down their lives for the land," he said.

According to opinion polls, most Israelis favor a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Some say the cost — both in money and in Israeli soldiers' lives — has been too high to justify a continued Israeli presence.

"Many of us have lost children for a cause none of us

believes in," said Robi Damelin, spokeswoman for the Parents Circle Families Forum, an organization of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost relatives in the violence. "There is no reason on earth we should be there."

As dusk falls Tuesday, a 20-year old soldier from Jerusalem mans his post overlooking the Palestinian town of Khan Yunis, which borders Neve Dekalim.

Black strips of plastic hang from the doorway, and the soldier keeps a hand on his machine gun, which is aimed through a window at Khan Yunis' squat concrete houses.

If anyone approaches the wall separating the settlement from the town, he is under orders to shoot, says the soldier, who is not allowed to give his name.

For the past two years he has served mostly in the Gaza Strip, he says, and he believes in his mission. A decision to evacuate, the soldier says, would only bring terrorism that much closer to Israel.

Inside the settlement, 20 families rejoiced Monday, the day they received permission from the government to begin construction on a new neighborhood.

The families shrugged off Sharon's comments about withdrawal — which, they noted, had been made the same day as permission was granted for the new neighborhood.

Many settlers are confident that the plan to evacuate Gaza will fall by the wayside, like so many others before it.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. won't fund Palestinian TV

The United States will not fund Palestinian Authority broadcasting. A provision in the budget proposed Monday by the White House pledges that no U.S. funds may be used "to provide equipment, technical support, consulting services or any other form of assistance to the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation."

There was no explanation for the move, but criticism of Palestinian incitement has increased in Congress in recent months.

State crosses out Jerusalem

The State Department has removed from its budget request a requirement to list Jerusalem as an Israeli city on the passports of U.S. citizens born there.

The requirement appears in the original White House-issued budget request to Congress on Monday. It reads, "For the purposes of the registration of birth, certification of nationality, or issuance of a passport of a United States citizen born in Jerusalem, the Secretary of State shall, upon request of the citizen, record the place of birth as Israel."

In its own request, however, the State Department runs a line through the requirement, crossing it out. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said he does not know why the section was deleted.

O.U. wants charitable choice

The Orthodox Union wants Congress to preserve charitable choice in legislation it is considering this week.

Some Democrats in the House of Representatives are set to amend this year's Community Services Block Grant — the program that channels funds to social service providers — to remove language that allows recipients to employ people according to their beliefs.

The House considers the grant Wednesday, and in its statement, the O.U. said it "strongly opposes such amendments as they will undercut religious liberty in the United States."

WORLD

Yad Vashem urges action on N. Korea

Yad Vashem called on the United Nations to investigate reports that North Korea is using gas chambers to kill political dissidents.

Avner Shalev, chairman of the directorate of Israel's central Holocaust museum, wrote that "the chilling images of the murderers coolly watching their victims' death agonies is all too reminiscent of Nazi barbarism."

The letter followed a BBC report on the internment, torture and murder of North Korean political dissenters.

Art exhibit questioned

British Jewry's central group complained to Christian Aid about a London art exhibit the charity sponsored.

The Board of Deputies said "The Inconvenience of History," a series of paintings by John Keane, amounted to a propaganda display with a distinctly pro-Palestinian voice, and asked if the charity had "any intention of displaying the tragic aftermath of terror attacks upon the Israeli population of Jews, Muslims and Christians."

Dominic Nutt, a Christian Aid spokesman, said it is fair to say the group's work in the Middle East focuses on Palestinian communities because the group "works where there is poverty, and the main focus there is in the Palestinian territories." He said the artist alone is responsible for the paintings and captions.

Nazi-looted painting auctioned off

A Nazi-looted painting was auctioned at Christie's in London for \$164,000.

Proceeds from this week's sale will go to the Jewish National Fund. "Garden Path to Summer House," by Max Slevogt, was returned to Peter Alexander, the son of its prewar owners.

Alexander died childless in 1999 and left instructions in his will that the painting should be sold, with the proceeds to go to charity. The Impressionist work fetched \$55,000 more than the auction house had expected.

Accused Nazi safe

A former SS man will not have to stand trial for murdering a member of the Dutch Resistance in 1944.

Dutch-born Herbitus Bikker — one of the last alleged Nazi war criminals to stand trial in Germany — reportedly is unable to concentrate on the proceedings, and the case is to be dropped.

The state prosecutor expressed disappointment with the decision. Bikker, 88, had been charged with murdering Jan Houtmann without cause in a labor camp in Holland.

The current trial was a result of an investigation started in 1996, after Dutch news reports publicized details about Bikker's alleged past.

Bikker was convicted of murder and sentenced to death in Holland in 1949.

But the sentence later was commuted to life in prison.

He escaped from jail in 1952 and found a haven in Germany, where — as a former soldier in the German army — he was safe from extradition.

MIDDLE EAST

Qurei: I like Gaza plan

The Palestinian Authority's prime minister praised Ariel Sharon's plan to pull most settlements out of the Gaza Strip.

Ahmed Qurei says the Israeli prime minister's plan will be good for Palestinians, according to reports on Israel Radio and on the Ma'ariv newspaper's Web site.

Sharon's top adviser, Dov Weisglass, is to meet Wednesday with senior Palestinian officials to discuss the plan.

Senior officials in Sharon's Likud Party, including Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and Knesset Speaker Ruby Rivlin, warn that the plan could lead to the government's collapse.

Men allegedly posed as terror victims

Israeli police arrested two people suspected of posing as victims of terrorism.

One of the two arrested Tuesday reportedly defrauded Christian groups out of a few thousand dollars by claiming he was injured in last week's bus bombing in Jerusalem.

Fewer refuseniks

The Israeli military reported fewer conscientious objectors in 2003.

According to figures presented to the Knesset on Tuesday by army manpower chief Maj. Gen. Gil Regev, 26 conscripts and reservists were jailed in 2003 for refusing to serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, compared with 129 the year before.

Activists insist there is no drop in the number of conscientious objectors, saying that objection often takes the form of soldiers who shirk service and that the army often discharges refuseniks rather than jail them.