

IN THE NEWS
Bush, Blair talk Gaza

President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair discussed Israeli-Palestinian issues at length Wednesday.

Bush and Blair met at the G8, the summit of industrialized nations, taking place this year in Sea Island, Ga. The two leaders talked about how the international community could help Palestinians administer the Gaza Strip once Israel withdraws, a senior Bush administration official said.

"They did go into some greater detail on Israeli-Palestinian issues, and they were discussing options for the way forward," the official said. The G8 referred to the Arab-Israeli conflict in its final statement, saying that calls for democratic reform in the Middle East go "hand-in-hand with our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli-conflict."

Israeli coalition talks seen ahead

Ariel Sharon is expected to hold coalition talks with the main opposition party in coming weeks.

A senior source in the Prime Minister's Office said Wednesday that negotiations between Sharon's Likud Party and the Labor Party were expected to begin before the Knesset's summer recess in August.

Moran wins primary

Rep. Jim Moran (D-Va.), who sparked an outcry last year by suggesting that Jewish influence led to the Iraq war, easily won a primary challenge.

Moran won 59 percent of the vote Tuesday, defeating challenger Andy Rosenberg, a Jewish lawyer from the northern Virginia suburbs.

Rosenberg highlighted a range of missteps by Moran and noted that Moran had been accused of anti-Semitism, but Moran, who has been in Congress since 1990, countered that he had more experience.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

Secret flight of N.Y. Yemenite Jews raises questions about Satmar ties

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — The elaborate passage of Yemenite Jews from a New York City suburb to Israel has prompted a torrent of allegations.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, which runs immigration and absorption, says its secret mission brought a Jewish woman and five of her children to Israel last week, raising suspicions that the family was held against its will by the surrounding community of Satmar Chasidim.

As evidence, the agency cited an effort last December to move the entire 21-member Nahari family to Israel.

But two of the children mysteriously went missing hours before the flight to Israel, said Michael Landsberg, director of the Jewish Agency's North American aliyah delegation. As a result, the whole family canceled the trip.

"Anyone can translate it the way anyone would like to translate it," he said.

One Nahari son rejects the notion that family members were held against their will.

"It's not right to lie about the Satmar," Yechil Nahari told The Journal News, a suburban New York newspaper. "No Satmar stopped my mother. They have helped us. My mother wanted to go see her sick parents in Israel. She had visa problems, and this group offered her a free ticket."

Yet Mrs. Nahari and her children are in Ashkelon's Beit Canada absorption center, a spot typically reserved for new immigrants, not visitors.

When Yemen allowed its Jews to emigrate

in the early 1990s, Satmar Chasidim, who are ideologically opposed to the idea of a Jewish state before the Messiah arrives, brought dozens of Yemenite Jews to the United States instead of to Israel.

Among them was the Nahari family, which came eight years ago.

The Satmars promised the Naharis and other Yemenites idyllic conditions in the United States but kept them in tight, crude quarters and took away their passports, according to the Yemenite Jewish Federation of America and the Jewish Agency.

In some cases, they even forced Yemenite women to marry Satmar men who were disabled or unappealing, and exploited them for fund-raising, said various members of the federation.

Rabbi Chaim Freund, who said he brought the Naharis from Yemen to the community in Monsey, N.Y.,

vehemently rejected all charges against the Satmars and said he knew all along about the family's plan to visit an ailing relative in Israel.

"Never have Satmars taken any passport from any Yemenite Jew or any other Jew," he said.

Furthermore, he said the Yemenite Jewish Federation does not represent the Yemenites in the Satmar community.

"Yemenites in Monsey have no connection with any Reform Jews which don't observe the Shabbos and kosher," he said.

The Yemenite Jewish Federation, which is funded by the UJA-Federation of New York and is not a Reform group, insists that some Yemenites in Orange County are being held against their will, and that all their moves

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**CAUGHT
IN THE
MIDDLE**

■ Secret flight of N.Y. Yemenite Jews raises questions on ties with Satmars

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are choreographed by the Satmars.

"The Yemenite people don't know anything other than what Satmars are telling them, and they are afraid," said a member of the Yemenite Jewish Federation who asked to remain anonymous.

The Satmars are holding the Yemenites "hostage," the woman said.

"Why in the world do we need the Israeli government to come here and do the Entebbe?" she said, likening Jewish Agency efforts in the Nahari case to the Israeli military's 1976 rescue of passengers whose plane had been hijacked by terrorists to Uganda.

A spokesman for the Jewish Agency, Yarden Vatikay, said the Naharis had been "brainwashed," told that their sidecurls would be cut and that they would become "goyim" if they moved to Israel.

Moshe Friedman, secretary to the Satmar rebbe, Moshe Teitelbaum, said the charge that the Nahari family was held against its will was "ridiculous."

"I'm certain there's no such thing," he said. It's "all political business."

The Jewish Agency made up the story out of pique that some Yemenites elected to come to the United States rather than Israel, he told JTA.

Samuel Heilman, professor of Jewish studies and sociology at the City University of New York and currently a fellow at Hebrew University's Institute for Advanced Studies, said the episode highlights a larger ideological conflict.

This is "just another skirmish in the

ongoing war between the Satmar anti-Zionism and the Israeli pro-Zionism," Heilman said.

When religious Yemenite Jews emigrated to Israel in the 1950s, Israelis attempting to absorb them into the fledgling, secular country pressured some to relinquish their religious customs.

In a few notorious cases, children who had become separated from their parents during the move to Israel were given to secular Israeli families, while their parents were told the children had died. Their ordeal came to light only decades later.

The "Yemenite child became a kind of symbol of the worst excesses of the Zionist state," Heilman said.

In the early 1990s, when Jews again were told they could leave Yemen, Satmars tried to "save them from secular Zionism and save them from the loss of their religion and bring them to the true Jewish homeland — namely, Satmarville," Heilman said.

Meanwhile, Zionists have been trying to show that "until these people are brought to the Jewish state, they're not really free," he said.

For five of the Nahari children and their mother, the journey to Israel began in the wee hours of June 1, when the family surreptitiously packed their bags, Landsberg said.

Later that day, the Jewish Agency sent a van to pick up the five children, who were dressed in their school uniforms. Their mother, who said she was going out to visit her father, joined them in the van, which took them to New York's John F. Kennedy Airport.

The rest of the family remained in New York.

"I didn't take them from their houses by myself. They asked for that," Landsberg said. "We're just helping them. Whatever they want to do, we are helping them."

Scores of Yemenite Jews live in Orange and Rockland counties, according to David Pollock, associate executive direc-

tor of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. Orange County also has many Satmars; many of them live in a village called Kiryas Joel. The balance of New York's Satmar community is centered in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg.

The episode suggests that the relationship between Yemenite Jews and Satmars in Rockland County is complex.

The Yemenite Jews were "induced to come here and their basic needs were taken care of in some way," Pollack said.

The question is

"if they knew about all of their options, would they choose differently" — to stay in New York or emigrate to Israel.

That, Pollock said, "probably varies from family to family."

Ephraim Isaac, president of the Yemenite Jewish Federation, charged that the Satmars exploited and abused a naive group.

He said that the two Yemenite families he visited in recent years lived in a cramped apartment, "almost like a jail room."

When he went to visit, Isaac said, "each time I was told not to come during the day because they're being spied upon by the community."

It's a "shocking, disgusting story that the Jewish community is partly responsible for," Isaac said, referring to American Jewish groups that pushed for the Yemenites' exit from Yemen but lacked a concrete follow-up plan for their resettlement.

Joel Petlin, an administrator in the Kiryas Joel school district, denied that the Yemenites were being abused.

Petlin said his bureau, which runs English-as-a-second-language programs for Yemenite Jews, would "be the first line" in catching any kind of funny business.

"They're welcomed, they're brought into the school system, they're given places to live, food to eat, and every resource is made available to assist them in their resettlement," Petlin said. "People are free to choose to stay or go."

Zionists have been trying to show that 'until these people are brought to the Jewish state, they're not really free.'

Prof. Samuel Heilman
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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Jewish groups at odds with ACLU over new bill

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish organizations are battling a leading civil liberties group to help pass new laws on religious freedom in the workplace.

After months of back-room discussions with the bill's supporters, the American Civil Liberties Union has decided to oppose the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which the Jewish community has been pushing for years.

The ACLU campaign against the legislation comes just as proponents had become increasingly optimistic that the U.S. Senate, which has sat on the legislation for more than a decade, would vote on the bill by the end of the year.

Though the Jewish proponents are still hopeful that the vote will proceed, the ACLU campaign could complicate progress on a measure that has long been a priority for some Jewish groups.

The legislation has not yet been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The legislation, known as WRFA, would give employees the right to seek accommodations for their religious practices as long as they do not create an undue hardship for the employer.

It would give observant Jews the right to wear head coverings and other religious garb, take time off for Shabbat and holidays, and participate in religious practices at work.

Though earlier civil rights bills gave religious protection, Jewish groups say the courts have undermined those provisions by ruling that almost any inconvenience posed an undue hardship on employers.

The proposed legislation would define an undue hardship as a significant cost — financial or logistical — to the place of business.

The measure is widely supported in the Jewish community, across the religious and political spectrum.

The bill has languished in Congress over the years because of private concerns raised by labor and business, concerns that have now apparently been worked out.

In addition, it never got full backing from any prominent leaders in Congress.

Now, however, it has gained the backing of two influential lawmakers, Sens.

Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, and John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive Democratic nominee for president. It also has support from several other religious groups, such as the National Association of Evangelicals and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The ACLU is the first major organization to publicly oppose the legislation. In a seven-page memo sent to all U.S. Senate offices last week, the ACLU claimed the legislation could create scenarios in which people use their religious practices as a crutch to violate the civil rights of others.

The ACLU expressed concern that under the proposed legislation, religious people could legitimately refuse to work with people of the opposite gender or with gays or lesbians, or that they could use the law to justify proselytizing or displaying a swastika.

The ACLU positively points to cases in which the courts have ruled in recent years that employers did not need to accommodate religious practices, and question whether the courts would rule the same way under WRFA.

Examples include a police officer's request to refuse to protect an abortion clinic and a social worker's use of Bible readings with prison inmates in counseling sessions.

The legislation "is overly broad in the way it was drafted, and could cause problems for employers that want to enforce non-discrimination policies that go further," Christopher Anders, ACLU's legislative counsel, told JTA.

The ACLU is seeking a narrower bill, one that would only require employers to provide accommodations for holiday observances, religious clothing and beards.

Many groups in the Jewish community, themselves advocates for abortion rights and non-discrimination, are used to working side by side with the ACLU on legislative matters.

But this time, they think the group is overreacting.

"I really believe they're wrong," said

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism. "This is one of the few times they're wrong."

Saperstein predicts that if WRFA becomes law, courts will continue to decide that employees cannot undermine an employer's effort to prevent discrimination and many of the scenarios the ACLU hypothesizes would not play out.

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, agrees.

One thing this legislation does not do in every circumstance "is give employees a trump card to say, 'My religion requires XYZ and you, the employer, must comply,'" Diament said.

Advocates note that no such problems have occurred in the five years since similar rules went into effect for federal employees, after President Clinton signed an executive order to that effect.

"This is a balancing test, and this is a fair balancing test," Saperstein said.

Jewish organizational leaders say they are frustrated they were unable to overcome their impasse with the ACLU in the eight months they have been discussing the issue.

The civil rights organization has strong ties with the Democratic minority in the Senate, and it would only take one senator to block the legislation from reaching a vote.

Still, Jewish groups are optimistic.

Santorum's office has indicated an interest in a vote, and Kerry's backing is expected to help the momentum among Democrats.

In fact, Jewish leaders believe Kerry's vocal support for the legislation, which he touted when he spoke to the Anti-Defamation League in May, could counterbalance the ACLU.

"The sense is there is some movement on the bill," said Richard Foltin, legislative director for the American Jewish Committee.

"The ACLU is a voice and people listen when they speak; that doesn't mean they are always persuasive."

'I really believe [the ACLU is] wrong. This is one of the few times they're wrong.'

David Saperstein

Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Lawsuit dismissed against German firms

A U.S. judge dismissed a lawsuit that claimed German firms withheld \$100 million from a slave labor fund.

The judge dismissed the lawsuit Tuesday, saying the claim that firms such as BMW, Volkswagen and Deutsche Bank withheld the money is a matter best left to diplomacy.

So far, approximately \$3 billion in payments have been made out of the roughly \$5 billion fund, which was created in 1999.

Birthright pledges more years

Birthright Israel pledged to continue the program for five more years. The commitment was made official Monday at a meeting in Israel of Birthright's steering committee, comprised of Israeli government leaders, philanthropists and representatives of the North American Jewish federation system.

But funding operates on a "year-to-year basis," said Robert Aronson, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and the federation system's liaison to Birthright. The program, which provides free trips to Israel for Diaspora youth, has suffered shortfalls in funding from the federation system and the Israeli government.

According to Aronson, "the federations have come up with a guarantee of funding for this year and next year," but the Israeli government's commitment for next year is still "up in the air." Birthright hopes to boost participation from 18,000 in 2004 to 20,000 in 2005.

Database for Hungarian Holocaust victims

A new project will document the fate of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

Established by the Hungarian government, the project is modeled after similar archives of German and Italian Jews created through the efforts of the World Jewish Congress and Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. The Hungarian initiative will draw on Yad Vashem's 55 million-document archive and specialists from the Holocaust Museum and Documentation Center in Budapest. When completed, victims' names will be added to Yad Vashem's Hall of Names.

MIDDLE EAST

Gaza airstrike

Israeli helicopter gunships hit a Hamas weapons arsenal. At least two helicopter-fired missiles hit the building in Gaza City early Wednesday morning, causing extensive structural damage but no casualties.

The airstrike came hours after Hamas fired a rocket across the Gaza border at the Israeli town of Sderot, narrowly missing a main highway.

Case closed on Sharon?

Israel's attorney general is due to rule next week on whether Ariel Sharon should be indicted in a bribery scandal.

The Justice Ministry said Wednesday that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz is expected to issue his decision by June 15. Media reports indicate Mazuz believes there is insufficient evidence to prosecute the Israeli prime minister, who is suspected of illicitly helping a property developer with a lucrative real-estate deal after the man hired Sharon's son as a consultant.

Syria warned over Lebanon tensions

Israel hinted that it could attack Syria if tensions persist on the Lebanon border. "All those involved in and responsible for the ac-

tions from Lebanon — and by this I also mean Syria — will be held accountable," the Israeli army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, said at a military exercise.

He was referring to this week's firing of rockets from southern Lebanon at an Israeli vessel off the coast and at Israeli troops in the Shebaa Farms border area. Israel retaliated by bombing a Palestinian terrorist facility near Beirut.

Gaza plan pushes ahead

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon asked Israeli officials to speed up plans for implementing his Gaza withdrawal plan.

The Disengagement Plan Steering Committee, comprising ministerial representatives, convened Wednesday after the Cabinet approved the withdrawal plan in principle Sunday.

Israel hunts rocket crews

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian during a hunt for Gazan rocket crews. Troops stormed Beit Hanoun, a Palestinian village on Gaza's boundary with Israel, on Wednesday after terrorist groups there renewed cross-border rocket fire. Military sources said a Palestinian who tried to attack the troops with an anti-tank missile was killed.

UNRWA rallies support

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency says it secured new aid for Palestinians.

Switzerland and UNRWA hosted a two-day meeting in Geneva to boost aid for Palestinians and said \$10.5 million was promised to the U.N. agency that cares for Palestinian refugees. "I expect six or seven times that" due to increased attention on the issues, UNRWA commissioner general Peter Hansen said. "Before the conference there were clear signs of donor fatigue."

Hansen said UNRWA would fulfill its \$194 million emergency appeal on top of its \$350 million annual budget, which has a \$100 million shortfall this year.

Israeli Arab taken off plane

An Israeli Arab reporter was prohibited from traveling with Israel's foreign minister for security reasons.

The Shin Bet called Eli Wakked of the Web site Ynet to inform him of the decision shortly before Silvan Shalom's plane was slated to take off for Egypt on Monday. The Union for Reporters on Arab Affairs protested the decision, calling it an infringement of free speech.

NORTH AMERICA

Wrestler fired for saluting Hitler

A U.S. cable news network fired a wrestler and financial analyst for making a Nazi salute during a wrestling match.

CNBC fired John "Bradshaw" Layfield after he made the salute and goose-stepped around the ring during a match last weekend in Munich. The wrestling federation also reprimanded him.

Leftist Jewish editor dies

Morris Schappes, a longtime Jewish leftist, journalist and historian, died June 3 in New York at age 97.

Schappes was a longtime editor of Jewish Currents Magazine, a leftist publication that slowly moved away from its pro-Communist line after Khrushchev revealed the extent of Stalin's crimes in 1956. Schappes was born Moishe Shapshilevich in what is now Ukraine and moved to the United States as a child. In the early 1940s he was jailed for more than a year for perjury after saying there were only three Communists teaching with him at the City College of New York, though he admitted his own membership in the party.