

IN THE NEWS

Kerry: I would defend Israel

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) told a B'nai B'rith convention that he would fight for a safe Israel.

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, who addressed the convention in Hollywood, Fla., by phone on Monday, said he has "a 100 percent record of supporting Israel," according to participants. "I will fight for a safe and secure Jewish State of Israel," he was quoted as saying.

He also said that he would review the case for release of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jewish naval analyst jailed for spying for Israel.

Five suspected terrorists killed

Israeli soldiers killed five Palestinians in the Gaza Strip the army said were on their way to carry out a terrorist attack.

Thursday's ambush took place as the Palestinians were on their way to the Netzarim junction. The gunfire exchange that killed the Palestinians lasted for several hours.

Gaza boy is killed in fighting

Israeli helicopters fired missiles at targets in the Gaza Strip. Thursday's attack wounded seven people, witnesses said.

Also Thursday, a Palestinian boy was killed during an Israeli raid in the Gaza Strip. Witnesses said the 9-year-old was shot by troops who entered the southern Gaza town of Rafah to hunt for arms-smuggling tunnels from nearby Egypt.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces mounted a rare raid on the normally quiet town of Jericho, arresting 30 suspected terrorists who the army said had taken refuge there.

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Reminder: The JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, July 5.

WORLD REPORT

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Sephardic National Alliance

Jack Avital, second from right, led a group of U.S. Syrian Jews to Damascus. At the presidential palace, the group presented Syrian President Bashar Assad, second from left, with a shofar.

As Syria frets under sanctions, Syrian Jews help build ties to U.S.

By RON KAMPEAS

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jack Avital speaks Arabic with Syrian inflections. He built his Brooklyn home like a Syrian villa, with a courtyard where he enjoys bitter Arabic coffee at sunset.

He built his company offices in New York like a Syrian palace, pale pink and fronted by an ornate gate.

True to his love of Syria, Avital, who is Jewish, commemorated the death in 2000 of Syria's longtime dictator, Hafez Assad, with a black-sash event attended by the Syrian ambassador to Washington.

So he readily admits that visiting the

country for the first time last month was an emotional experience.

"There were tears in our eyes at the airport," said Avital, who led a 12-man delegation representing the Sephardic National Alliance, a group composed mainly of Syrian Jews.

Such strong feelings for a country most of the delegation had never seen — and for a dynasty reviled, among other reasons, for keeping its Jews from emigrating until the late 1980s — is not unusual in America's Syrian Jewish community, which is centered in Brooklyn.

Syrian Jews here have maintained a
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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

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strong, insular identity as well as quiet and friendly business ties with Syria, especially since Hafez Assad allowed the Jews who emigrated to maintain their businesses and properties there, and many still collect profits and rents from clients in Syria.

What is unusual is the degree to which the Syrian Jews here and the government in Damascus — neither party known for being particularly outgoing — are willing to make the relationship public.

There are clear implications to the new openness: It suggests a greater Syrian willingness to reach out to the United States, and eventually Israel, at a time when Syrian officials say recent U.S. sanctions will crimp their already troubled economy.

One aim of the outreach is to reverse Syria's poor image in the United States, and to help persuade President Bush to back down from the sanctions. The sanctions were imposed because of Syria's failure to crack down on terrorist groups and to end programs to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Syria is not the first country to seek to mend fences with the United States by courting Jewish groups, long believed in the Arab world to have inordinate influence in Washington.

Avital, who owns Jackie Vital, an urban fashion design house, has established ties in New York's Jewish community, and he is close to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Likud Party. He arranged

a meeting between Syria's ambassador to Washington, Imad Moustapha, and Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), who backed the sanctions in Congress.

U.S. State Department officials speak approvingly of the delegation's visit to Syria and suggest it helps them assess whether Bashar Assad is trying to outgrow the legacy of his isolationist, totalitarian father.

In fact, the officials confirm, they had a role in encouraging the Syrian regime to invite the Jewish delegation.

Leaders of the mainstream American Jewish community largely have been silent about the visit, though the Zionist

Organization of America expressed its "disappointment" with the group.

The delegation met with U.S. Ambassador Margaret Scobie during the visit, a meeting that was featured on the front pages of Syrian newspapers and on the television evening news.

There are other, subtle signs of greater Syrian openness, though it's too soon to know how wide-ranging they are. One benchmark for progress will be next month's conference of the ruling Ba'ath Party. One Omani newspaper report has said the party will renounce its decades-old pledge never to negotiate with Israel.

Moustapha himself is a sign that Assad might be wresting power away from the old guard. Assad went over the head of Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa, a bulwark of Syria's old guard, to appoint Moustapha, known for his Western outlook.

On arriving in Washington earlier this year, Moustapha immediately sought out the Syrian Jewish community, which numbers itself at 80,000. He and Avital say they bonded over a meal at Avital's house, cuisine that Moustapha recognized as "from home."

Avital said he immediately "clicked" with the fast-talking ambassador. He invited Moustapha to a wedding, which is where Moustapha issued his invitation to the delegation to visit Syria.

Both men insist that the visit was more a natural homecoming for the Jews than a tool of statecraft. Yet they acknowledge the implications of the visit.

"If both sides asked us to be a bridge, we would gladly do it," Avital said. He said that one highlight of the trip was the delegation's meeting with Assad. "The president said that when the Jews left the country, Syria became unblessed," he said.

It wasn't the delegation's place to bring up political issues, Avital said, and, with one exception, the group devoted its time to seeking out sites of Jewish interest.

The exception was when delegates raised a report that Assad told Pope John Paul II in 2000 that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. Assad denied the report, Avital said, and said his remarks had been

taken out of context.

What most impressed the delegation, Avital said, was the pristine condition of the Jewish sites. Avital is known for his work preserving Jewish cemeteries in North Africa and Europe, and he was impressed by the state of the ancient cemeteries in Syria, producing snapshots of rows of gleaming white tombstones.

Avital and Moustapha also were impressed with the warm reception the delegation received outside the palace. Moustapha was relieved that the visit had gone well.

"In the plane, I was thinking, 'What if I'm wrong, what if people will treat them badly?'" Moustapha said. "I know that the government will treat them well, officially speaking, but what about popular reaction, what if the president is nice with them but then the people are abusing them in the street? It will undermine my whole effort."

Instead, both men say, the reception was universally warm. Upon learning that the delegation was Jewish, people rushed forward to ask the group for its blessings. A Damascus restaurant went out of its way to order meat from a glatt kosher butcher.

Avital singled out the mufti of Aleppo, who at a dinner for the delegation recounted tales of Jewish-Muslim cooperation and said that religious schools included in their text a legendary tale of Jewish-Muslim resistance to Persian tyranny. "Jews are royalty," the Mufti said, "their word is true," Avital said. "With the Arabs, you give respect, and you receive respect." ■

'Parlor meetings on Ocean Parkway are not as important as policy changes in Damascus.'

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.)

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European elections kind to far right

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Self-Defense, the Peasants' Party and the League of Polish Families might be unfamiliar names for most European politicians, but all three far-right parties are set to enter the European Parliament following elections last month.

The three parties polled close to 40 percent of the vote in Poland, the largest of 10 new countries that joined the European Union in May.

If one or more of the parties chooses to ally with other far-right groups in Europe, they may be able to create a formal faction in the Parliament.

Until now, the far right has failed to break into the European Parliament because it either was unable to muster support in a sufficient number of countries or could not overcome mutual animosity between its various components.

Now, though, with nationalist, xenophobic and sometimes openly anti-Semitic parties helped by exceptionally low turnouts and good vote-getting in some Eastern European countries, the goal of a united European far-right faction could become a reality.

That would require at least 19 legislators from at least five countries.

If they can meet that standard, the parties would get official E.U. funding, offices and cars, as well as a certain degree of respectability.

The results of the June 10-13 European elections show that 66 legislators from across Europe will not be aligned with any of the current official parliamentary groups.

Around 40 of them can be described as xenophobic, and some of them as openly racist and anti-Semitic.

Among mainstream political parties, virtually all ran national rather than pan-European campaigns, but one small party in the Paris region ran for a different, hypothetical country: Palestine.

The Euro-Palestine Party aimed to elect a spokesperson for Palestine in the European Parliament.

It ran a virulently anti-Israel campaign but failed miserably, garnering less than 2 percent of the vote in Ile de France, the region comprising the Paris metropolitan area, which has a large Muslim population.

The party's candidates included a well-known comic, Dieudonne M'Bala M'Bala, who recently was found guilty of making anti-Semitic remarks, as well as a number of prominent anti-Zionist Jews.

However, the party failed to break through the 4 percent barrier necessary to enter the legislature, and saddled itself with a \$125,000 debt to election authorities.

While that failure probably was the only attempt to campaign directly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the composition of the new Parliament is not without relevance for supporters of Israel.

Overall, the center-right European People's Party, or EPP, consolidated its position as the largest party in the legislature.

With only 276 seats in the 732-member legislature, however, it remains well short of a majority.

The EPP, which is made up of most of Europe's mainstream conservative parties, generally has been credited with a more balanced position toward Israel than left-wing parties, which have been more critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

Gains for Euro-skeptic parties could go both ways as far as Jewish groups are concerned.

While some of the parties ultimately could stand in the way of collective E.U. policy on issues such as anti-Semitism, others, such as the United Kingdom's Independence Party and Italy's post-fascist National Alliance, are seen as Atlanticists with a gut-level support for Israel.

The far right wasn't close to being one of the big winners in the elections, but it rode a wave of discontent with E.U. institutions among established members of the bloc and, in some cases, polled well in countries that only recently joined the union.

Overall, the gains that were made by nationalist and Euro-skeptic parties will have little effect on the political balance in the Parliament.

Still, they do indicate an increasing trend of voters that prefer national aspi-

rations over the interests of Europe as a whole.

In some cases, far-right parties are regional rather than nationalist, such as Italy's Northern League and the Vlaams Blok in Belgium.

The Blok polled extremely well in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region in the north of Belgium, where it took 24 percent of the vote and almost topped the poll.

The Blok will take three seats at the European Parliament, where, but for its historic animosity toward Jean-Marie Le Pen's French-speaking National Front, it could join up with other far-right, xenophobic groups.

For some other far-right parties, a predicted surge did not materialize, as they had to compete with right-wing populist movements running on anti-European tickets.

In Britain for example, where the British National Party was looking to capitalize on recent gains made in local council elections, the party failed to make any kind of electoral breakthrough and will therefore not be represented in the European Parliament.

In France, the National Front failed to make much headway, polling around 10 percent nationally, well below the support it garnered in recent regional and national elections.

Similarly, in Austria, Jorg Haider's Freedom Party polled badly where it had to compete with a populist anti-corruption candidate as well as Austria's mainstream political parties.

The Freedom Party nonetheless will be represented with three members in the Parliament, where it might break new ground in a working relationship with the seven legislators from the National Front.

Other far-right alliances may prove more problematic.

Ultimately, only time will tell whether the antagonism the far-right groups often feel for one another proves stronger than their undisguised animosity for foreigners, Jews and other European minority groups.

After gains by some xenophobic and anti-Semitic parties, the goal of a united far-right European faction could actually become a reality.

Kerry considers his running mates

By **RON KAMPEAS** and
MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It's hunting season in Washington, and the prey wins the prize: second place on the Democratic Party ticket.

The excitement of the chase belongs to the Democrats in 2004, since President Bush has said he will keep Vice President Dick Cheney on his ticket.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate, has played his cards close to his chest, reportedly because he learned from a leak to the press in 2000 that he had been dropped from Al Gore's short list of running mates, and he wants to spare others the same humiliation.

Not everything can be kept secret, however, and repeat meetings with Kerry, along with the appearance of Kerry's background checkers at small-town libraries across the country, have suggested three front-runners: Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack.

A number of other dark-horse candidates remain in the pool; each has had interactions with the Jewish communities in their states.

Following are profiles of Kerry's potential running mates, in alphabetical order:

■ **• Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.):**

Biden, 61, is well known in the Jewish world, having served for more than 30 years in the Senate. The former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden has been an outspoken backer of Israel.

"He's extraordinarily knowledgeable about so many areas of the world, particularly the Middle East," said Toni Young, a former president of the Jewish Federation of Delaware. "We tend to go to him on things international."

Biden has suggested that his many years in the Senate and on the Foreign Relations Committee have freed him from "politically correct" constraints. He is a tough advocate of Israel's right to defend itself but also is an outspoken critic of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's failure to freeze settlement building in the West Bank, saying it has done Israel more harm than good.

Biden has been tough on the Bush ad-

ministration, suggesting it has not been engaged sufficiently in the Middle East and did not do enough to aid Mahmoud Abbas during his brief tenure as Palestinian Authority prime minister.

■ **• Gen. Wesley Clark:**

Clark's candidacy in the Democratic primaries generated excitement among American Jews, both because of the pride and interest Clark took in his discovery that his father was Jewish and because of the familiarity he showed with Israel's security needs.

The former NATO commander referred to Israeli generals on a first-name basis and parsed the differences among them on how to defend the Jewish state. Clark was able to raise \$1 million in a single evening from a New York Jewish audience, and he was one of the few candidates to hire a full-time Jewish outreach official early in the season.

Clark, who is from Arkansas, could help Kerry in the South, and his service in the military could further highlight differences from the Republican ticket: Kerry and Clark both were wounded in Vietnam, while neither Bush nor Cheney served there.

Clark, 59, has successfully negotiated peace, in Bosnia, and prosecuted war, in Kosovo. Significantly, his gut-level empathy for Israel means he received little grief for taking exactly the same position on Israeli-Palestinian peace as did Kerry — one that envisions a more multilateral approach to peace brokering.

■ **• Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.):**

Edwards' greatest strength among Jewish voters may be that he has never really needed their support.

North Carolina's Jewish community is small and lacks the influence of larger communities, and the trial lawyer's 1998 run for the Senate was largely self-financed. Yet North Carolina Jews give Edwards high marks for outreach to them.

"John would always make himself available to us," Randall Kaplan, a Greensboro board member of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, told JTA earlier this year. Kaplan advised Edwards' campaign on Middle Eastern issues.

Edwards, 51, who grew up poor in the Carolinas, speaks eloquently of the disenfranchised. His rags-to-riches story could give Kerry traction in Southern states,

and his views on extending health care and education to those on society's margins could appeal to Jewish voters.

Edwards sought advice from the pro-Israel community when he earned a spot on the Senate Intelligence Committee. He visited Israel with committee colleagues in 2001 and was there when a suicide attack occurred in downtown Jerusalem.

■ **• Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.):**

Gephardt tearfully announced his retirement from politics after losing in the Iowa caucuses in January, disappointing many Jews in Missouri and elsewhere, but Gephardt now is considered one of the front-runners in Kerry's considerations for vice president.

Gephardt, 63, had a strong pro-Israel

THE HUNT
FOR NO. 2



Pictured are, clockwise: Gov. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.), Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) and Gov. Tom Vilsack (Iowa).

record after arriving in Congress in 1977 and through his career as the Democratic leader in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1989-2002. He was the highest-ranking congressional official to speak at an April 15, 2002, solidarity rally for Israel at the Capitol.

On domestic issues, Gephardt's lead on health care issues and help pushing through hate-crimes legislation earned him kudos from Jewish voters.

Jews in Gephardt's hometown of St. Louis credit him with keeping close ties to the community, meeting Jewish communal leaders for brunch three or four times a year and taking an early lead on Soviet

Jewry issues in the 1980s.

Gephardt could bring Midwestern credibility and strong union endorsements to Kerry's campaign. His popularity with working-class voters also could help with another key constituency in some battleground states: Arab Americans.

Gephardt's blue-collar credentials earned him a warm welcome at an Arab American Institute conference in Michigan in October, despite the fact that he had among the strongest pro-Israel records of any candidate there and hardly mentioned foreign policy in his speech.

• Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.):

Graham received a great deal of Jewish support in his home state when he ran for president last year, and his name on the Democratic ticket could lead more Jews to vote for Kerry in a must-win state.

As a governor and senator, Graham



Pictured are, clockwise: Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) and Gen. Wesley Clark.

actively backed Israel, a political necessity given Florida's significant Jewish population. He frequently has spoken out in Israel's defense on the Senate floor.

In addition to helping Kerry in Florida and the South, Graham could add credibility on security issues because of the tough-minded reputation he earned as the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee. He accuses the Bush administration of failing to pay enough attention to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as breeding grounds for terrorism, a message Democrats know resonates with Jewish voters who otherwise give Bush high marks on security.

Graham recently has pressured the administration to take a tougher stance against Syria's support for terrorist organizations in Lebanon.

• Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.):

Like Graham, Nelson, 61, has won rave reviews from Florida's Jewish community. Though he has been in the Senate only four years, the former astronaut has gained a reputation as an advocate for Jewish community priorities, specifically social issues.

"He at least listens to our arguments and, more often than not, he signs on," said Amy Dean, chairwoman of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

Dean praised both Florida lawmakers, saying they have worked to gain appropriations for Florida's Jewish community, and she noted that Nelson has signed on to pro-Israel resolutions in the Senate.

Nelson could offer Kerry a lift in Florida, a crucial battleground state; however, the freshman senator has suggested he would prefer to defer the vice presidency to Graham.

• Gov. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.):

Richardson, 56, would be an obvious pick for Kerry if he believes that it's crucial to stem Republican inroads into the predominantly pro-Democratic Hispanic community.

Richardson, who before his 2002 election as New Mexico governor served as a congressman and Cabinet officer, is the nation's most prominent Hispanic politician. He is to chair next month's Democratic Party convention.

Richardson also could help Kerry make inroads into the Jewish community: Pro-Israel lobbyists in Washington praise him for his performance as U.N. ambassador from 1997 to 1998. They recall an instance in which Richardson suspended a Security Council debate to fly to Washington for a briefing with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's executive committee.

"He is someone who is very well versed in the foreign policy area, and someone who's been a friend of Israel," said Jess Hordes, director of the Anti-Defamation League's National and Governmental Affairs office in Washington.

As energy secretary from 1998-2000, Richardson expanded scientific coopera-

tion with Israel; as governor, he directed New Mexico's recent purchase of \$10 million in Israeli government bonds.

Richardson also was a friend on domestic issues, Jewish officials say.

Richardson also could bolster Kerry's foreign policy credentials. A four-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize, Richardson is the only Clinton-era Democrat the Bush administration has turned to for diplomatic help, notably on the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons.

• Gov. Tom Vilsack (D-Iowa):

Iowa's small Jewish community has nothing but good things to say about Vilsack. Back-and-forths at Des Moines' Tifereth Israel synagogue are a must-do for Iowa candidates, and Vilsack always gets a warm reception — to the extent that in 2002 the Des Moines Register called the venue "potentially hostile" to Republicans.

That's because Vilsack has been hands-on with the 6,000-strong Jewish community, according to Paulee Lipsman, a Jewish Democrat and a senior staffer in the state legislature.

Vilsack, 53, exempted Holocaust survivors from state taxes on recovered insurance funds and has issued a proclamation each Yom Hashoah, attending ceremonies on some occasions.

Such dedication to Holocaust remembrance is significant in a state where Holocaust deniers have made some inroads in rural areas, according to local Jewish officials. Lipsman says Vilsack jibes with local Jews on domestic issues, a plus in a state where the Republican-dominated legislature trends conservative.

"He has consistently vetoed anti-choice bills that have come through the legislature, he has worked hard to expand health care to children, he worked hard with limited Medicaid to provide health care for seniors," she said.

Vilsack could appeal to Kerry as a Democrat from a conservative state who has won two elections running on bread-and-butter social issues. But on foreign policy, a crucial issue in a war-year election, he's a blank slate.

That's true on Israel, too — not surprising for the governor of a Midwestern state that has little business with the Middle East. Vilsack has indicated that one day he would like to visit Israel.

Swing voters and swing states may decide who Kerry picks to be No. 2.

Survivors may get more from Swiss banks

By JOE BERKOFISKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Swiss banks and the U.S. judge overseeing a \$1.25 billion settlement of Holocaust-era claims have reached an agreement that may yield hundreds of millions of dollars in additional assets for survivors and their heirs.

Reached June 10 between Credit Suisse, UBS AG and the U.S. District Court of Eastern New York, the agreement for the first time will publicize information about thousands of accounts and will establish a U.S. database to field claims through the Claims Conference, the principal body dealing with Holocaust restitution.

"This gives us the information to try to give the money to the right people," Burt Neuborne, a New York University law professor and the court-appointed lead settlement counsel, told JTA.

The agreement comes in the wake of a stormy April hearing before U.S. District Court Judge Edward Korman that saw survivors and dozens of groups from the United States, Israel and Europe vying

for the lion's share of some \$650 million remaining from the historic 1998 class-action settlement with the Swiss banks.

Their pleas came after Korman issued several memorandums earlier this year indicating that after \$593 million had been awarded to survivors or their heirs, as well as others impacted by Swiss complicity in Nazi actions — including Swiss refugees and slave laborers for Swiss firms — he likely would award most of the remaining money to the poorest survivors, who are believed to live in the former Soviet Union.

Korman also accused the Swiss banks of trying to "delay justice" and cover up frozen Holocaust-era assets through strict secrecy laws.

If it helps more survivors to recover lost assets, the June 10 agreement could mean that less is available for needy survivors who didn't have Swiss accounts.

Of the money awarded so far, nearly \$155 million has gone directly to some 2,000 survivors who had accounts in Swiss banks, or their heirs. A claims tribunal screened 33,000 claims for 20,000

names the Swiss agreed to make public.

Court memos indicate that the average award was \$170,000, though assets varied widely in size, officials said.

Under the latest agreement, the banks will publish information about 5,000 more Swiss accounts where the names match lists of Holocaust survivors but lack other corroborating documentation.

That will "give people a chance to step forward" to provide additional evidence linking them to the accounts, Neuborne said.

The banks also finally allowed 13,500 claims that did not match bank lists, but agreed to rank them on the basis of relative documentary strength such as bank books, documents or personal narratives, Neuborne said.

The banks also agreed to try to match those claims not from a 13,600-name database but from a much broader file of 4.1 million names, dubbed the "total account database."

Two thousand of the strongest claims will be reviewed in depth to determine if they match account data. ■

Activists learn how to defend Israel in the media

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Bobbie Goldstein thought her passion was an asset.

It didn't matter, she said she had thought, when her voice would rise and her tone would become more strident when defending Israel at her public appearances. What mattered was that she was getting her feelings across.

Now, the national campaign chairman for State of Israel Bonds realizes her attitude diminished her argument.

"What I need to do is level it off a little bit," Goldstein said. "Give calm, collected answers that get my point across."

Goldstein has a private session with a media trainer to thank for her new outlook — part of a three-day conference for pro-Israel advocates in Washington.

The conference, conceived by The Israel Project, has as its goal maximizing the pro-Israel arguments of speakers in the media and elsewhere.

With Middle East issues almost always in the news, the program hopes to create a network of Israel advocates who can effectively back the Jewish state in the media in times of crisis, and push for positive news coverage at other times.

It is a grass-roots attempt to change what many Jews see as a trend toward negative representations of Israel in American mainstream media.

Unlike most conferences for Israel advocates, this gathering

did not begin with discussions of Middle East politics, updates on the current situation and predictions for the future.

None of that would have been news to the 300 participants. They are the most active of the active, the best informed of the well informed.

These are the people who call in to radio talk shows to make pro-Israel arguments, send letters to local newspapers and take journalists to task for coverage they view as slanted.

Instead, the conference focused on tailoring their activism to approaches that can get best results.

They learned which arguments about Israel's role in the Middle East and the conflict with the Palestinians is sympathetic to non-Jewish media consumers, and how best to make Israel's case to journalists.

"This is media relations for people who used to think media relations was waiting for someone to call you," said Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, a media relations professional who founded The Israel Project.

Speakers highlight the need to stress hope for the future when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the importance of not demonizing the Palestinians.

They also tout the value of long-term relationships with journalists, not just keeping contacts confined to sudden complaints.

The media training borrows approaches from political campaigns and corporate ventures, and it is based on polling of which pro-Israel arguments work for a broader audience. ■

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS

■ Randall Chapman was elected chairman of the board of directors of Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life; Clare Goldwater was named director of Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning.

■ Baltimore judge Ellen Heller was named president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

■ Rabbi Andrew Davids was named executive director of ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

■ The UJA-Federation of New York chose Morris Offit and Susan Stern as president and chairwoman of the board.

■ Keren Hayesod, the fund-raising umbrella for Israel of international Jewish communities excluding America, appointed Greg Masel director general.

■ Carl Sheingold was named executive vice president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, the congregational arm of the Reconstructionist movement.

HONORS

■ Rabbi Irwin Kula, president of CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, received the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Advocate of the Year award.

■ The UJA-Federation of New York gave its Steven J. Ross Humanitarian Award to Michael Eisner, CEO of the Walt Disney Company. The federation's publishing division honored Jack Romanos, president and CEO of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

■ The Jewish Federation of Greater Chicago honored CEO Steve Nasatir for 25 years of leadership.

■ Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) received the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty's Woman of the Year award.

■ The American Jewish World Service honored Judea and Ruth Pearl, parents of slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, and actress Kathleen Turner.

■ The Israel Cancer Research Fund honored actress Tovah Feldshuh and crime novelist Linda Fairstein as Women of Action.

■ Baseball players Brad Ausmus, Ron Blomberg, Mike Epstein, Sid Gordon, Elliott Maddox and Tiby Eisen were inducted into the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame. Also inducted were lacrosse official Al Blau, football player Benny Friedman, basketball player Dutch Garfinkel, rugby player Shawn Lipman and rower Aerial Gilbert.

■ The Confederation House in Jerusalem was renamed for its founder, JTA board member Kalman Sultanik. Sultanik also is a member of the Zionist Executive and the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors, associate president of the World Confederation of United Zionists and a vice president of the World Jewish Congress.

Rabbi OK in 'Indecent Proposal' case

By ANDREW MORRIS

LONDON (JTA) — First it was a rumor in a London synagogue, then a matter for the religious courts.

By the time a British jury finally came to its verdict last week, Maccaba v. Lichtenstein had garnered headlines worldwide and, at 41 days, had turned into the longest British slander trial in history.

The salacious tale of alleged infidelity had all the ingredients of a good yarn — "power, money and vengeance," according to the lawyer for Yaakov Yisrael Lichtenstein, the defendant in the lawsuit brought by Orthodox millionaire Brian Maccaba.

For two months, Hollywood came to Britain's High Court, with the spotlight on the normally camera-shy and closet-knit Orthodox community.

After 32 hours of deliberation, the jury found in Lichtenstein's favor, determining that he had not slandered Maccaba, who along the way had been described as a serial adulterer and sexual predator who chased young, married Jewish women.

Britain's "Indecent Proposal" case borrowed its central elements from the movie in which a millionaire played by Robert Redford offers a newlywed, played by Demi Moore, and her husband \$1 million for a night with her.

In this case, Maccaba, a married 45-year-old from London who had converted from Catholicism to become an Orthodox Jew, offered a 35-year-old Orthodox law student, Nathalie Attar, \$1 million if she would leave her husband and marry him.

Chief executive of the computer giant Cognotec, Maccaba met Attar in 1999, when she became a tutor to Maccaba's children. The two grew closer when she became a teacher at an Orthodox school Maccaba founded.

As time went on, Attar grew increasingly uneasy about Maccaba's intentions. Though Maccaba told the High Court that their relationship was platonic, Attar said Maccaba had become infatuated with her and made unwanted physical advances.

Attar and her husband Alain eventually became so upset about Maccaba's behavior that they moved to Israel not long after Attar lost her job at the school — a firing she attributed to rumors spread by a spurned Maccaba.

This was the point at which Attar's rabbi suggested she complain to Lichtenstein, the senior rabbinic judge of the fervently Orthodox Federation of Synagogues.

In 2001, Lichtenstein took the matter to the federation's religious court, the Kedassia Beth Din. The court found that Attar's charges lacked evidence. In bringing the matter before the religious courts, however, Lichtenstein made an enemy of Maccaba, an influential philanthropist in the Jewish community.

It was during Lichtenstein's investigation of Maccaba that the infamous "indecent proposal" was made in a poem the millionaire wrote to Attar, which she then shared with Lichtenstein. The poem was one of several that Maccaba, who has won awards for poetry in his native Gaelic, sent to Attar.

Titled "Knocking on Heaven's Door," it included the lines, "The stranger said she was his true soul mate, he would love her forever. He would do anything for her. If only she was free — a golden key. A

A tale of sex, cash, slander and revenge.

bachelor's freedom again — \$1m cash in the bank tax-free."

Maccaba said it was just a "silly" poem, that the offer was never serious, and that he intended to distance himself from Attar because he believed they were becoming too close. But, as Alain Attar told the High Court, Maccaba made the offer again in person, when he visited the couple's Hendon home.

Maccaba was ostracized by the Orthodox community after the allegations became public. Incensed and feeling that he was not getting a fair hearing in the religious community, he took the matter to civil court.

Lichtenstein claimed he never accused Maccaba of committing adultery.

"He never committed adultery. But he did violate the Tenth Commandment: Thou shalt not covet someone else's wife," Lichtenstein said.

By a majority of 10-1, the jury found that Lichtenstein had not slandered Maccaba, breached his confidence or harassed him. Because the allegations Lichtenstein discussed had been "substantially true," they were not malicious, the jury found.

The ruling could cost Maccaba more than \$3.6 million in court costs. Maccaba is appealing the decision. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Buffer zone for Gaza town

Israel plans to set up a buffer zone around a Gaza Strip town used by Palestinian terrorists for rocket attacks.

Israeli forces stormed Beit Hanoun on Tuesday after a Hamas rocket launched from there killed two people in Sderot, a town just over the Israeli border, on Monday.

According to security sources, the army plans to stay in Beit Hanoun for several months, setting up a 4-square-mile buffer zone to keep Sderot out of rocket range.

French minister: Arafat essential

France's foreign minister said Israeli-Palestinian peace was impossible without the backing of Yasser Arafat.

Following a meeting this week with the Palestinian Authority president at Arafat's Ramallah office, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier made his comments to the French radio station RTL.

Barnier met Arafat as part of a Middle East tour that included Egypt and Jordan but that skipped Israel after Israeli officials made clear they wouldn't meet Barnier if he met with Arafat. Barnier said he likely would visit Israel in a few weeks.

Sees through walls

An Israeli company has developed a device that sees through walls.

A small startup, Camero, based in Herzliya, has built a radar system that from a distance of 65 feet can produce three-dimensional images of what's behind a wall, Ha'aretz reported. Such images, using ultra wide-band technology similar to ultrasounds, could be used by troops hunting terrorists.

Poll: Israelis like America

Israelis view the United States as Israel's truest friend, according to a new poll.

Ninety-one percent of the 500 Israelis in the poll commissioned by the Hudson Institute have a favorable impression of the United States. Sixty-nine percent of those polled see the United States as a friend that can be trusted even in difficult times.

Druse pays his dues

A senior Druse commander in the Israeli army was court-martialed for abusing subordinates.

Col. Imad Fares got a three-month suspended jail sentence Thursday for conduct unbecoming an officer after a Tel Aviv tribunal found him guilty of verbally abusing soldiers while serving as commander of the Givati infantry brigade.

The court, which acquitted Fares on charges of physically assaulting his subordinates, said he could not be promoted for at least another year.

WORLD

Pro-Israel meet in South Africa?

South Africa's new ambassador to Israel suggested that a meeting be held on "the inalienable right of Israel to live in peace and prosperity."

The call, at the end of a U.N. meeting in South Africa on the "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people" came in a JTA interview with the new ambassador, Fumi Gqiba.

Following the conference on the Palestinian issue, Gqiba suggested another meeting, organized not by the United Nations but by South Africa, on Israel.

"That will be powerful. It will show the world we are concerned," he said. It's a "myth that South Africa is anti-Israel," he said. "It's untrue. We have been trying to strike a balance to support both sides. Our task is to facilitate dialogue."

Danish fence protest slammed

Israeli officials blasted a Danish aid group for erecting a mock fence at a European music festival to protest Israel's West Bank security barrier.

"If it's political activism, fine, but don't call yourself an aid organization," Ephraim Ben-Mattiyahu, Israel's deputy chief of mission in Denmark, said of the plywood fence erected by DanChurchAid at the festival near Copenhagen.

A spokesman for the group said the protest was in line with criticisms of the fence made by the European Union and the United Nations.

Photo exhibit honors Holocaust children

A Paris train station is hosting a photo exhibit dedicated to children killed in the Holocaust.

The exhibition began Thursday and is to run until July 19 at the Gare du Nord station.

It marks the last stage of a series of exhibitions held in railway stations across France marking the 60th anniversaries of the convoys that left the country for Nazi death camps. Begun in 2002, the exhibitions have been organized by the Sons and Daughters of French Jewish Deportees, with the support of the French national railroad company.

NORTH AMERICA

Water, water everywhere

The Orthodox Union will demand water filters in New York City restaurants under its supervision.

The decision comes after minuscule, non-kosher crustaceans were found in New York City tap water. The union hasn't yet publicized its recommendation to restaurants and observant Jews to filter their water, but told the Forward that any commercial filter "would do the trick."

The union is planning to provide recommendations, such as buying under-the-sink units and using cartridges with rubber seals to prevent leaking.

ADL gives parties its thoughts

The Anti-Defamation League urged the Republican and Democratic parties to fight terrorism and anti-Semitism. The ADL submitted its policy priorities to both parties' platform committees ahead of the national conventions this summer.

The group is seeking increased resources for law enforcement to combat terrorism and wants the U.S. to show leadership in the global fight against anti-Semitism. It also seeks increased civil rights protection, continued support for Israel and the extension of hate crimes legislation to cover crimes based on sexual orientation, gender and disability.

They're going to Disney World

Students from a U.S. Jewish school won a national science contest and a free trip to Disney World.

The eighth-graders from Hillel Academy in Fairfield, Conn., won a gold medal at the Christopher Columbus Awards this week for research showing that recycled rubber can make playgrounds safer. In addition to the Disney World trip, the four members of the team each won a \$2,000 U.S. savings bond.