

## IN THE NEWS

**Deadly clashes  
in Beit Hanoun**

Israeli troops hunting for Gaza Strip rocket crews killed nine Palestinians in clashes. Thursday's fighting in Beit Hanoun, a Palestinian town on the Gaza-Israel boundary, was the heaviest since the army invaded the strip last week following a deadly Hamas rocket salvo on the Israeli town of Sderot. An Israeli soldier was seriously wounded.

Meanwhile, five Israeli soldiers were wounded when Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile and detonated a roadside bomb in the Gaza Strip.

**Nuke watchdog  
presses Israel**

A U.N. nuclear watchdog urged Israel to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and open its facilities to inspection.

"Trying to treat India, Pakistan and Israel as if they do not exist is a bureaucratic fiction," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Thursday.

Like the other two countries, Israel refuses to allow inspections of its assumed nuclear arsenals. ElBaradei voiced understanding of Israeli security needs and welcomed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's assurance that Israel would consider disarming if a comprehensive Middle East peace is achieved.

**Vatican: Anti-Zionism  
equals anti-Semitism**

Vatican leaders signed on to a statement identifying anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism.

A statement expressing "total rejection of anti-Semitism in all its forms, including anti-Zionism as a more recent manifestation of anti-Semitism," was released Thursday at the end of the 18th International Liaison Committee meeting between Jewish and Catholic leaders in Buenos Aires.

■ **MORE NEWS, Pg. 8.**

# WORLD REPORT

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Sharon Farmer/John Kerry for President, Inc.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and John Edwards (D-N.C.) talk in Pittsburgh on Tuesday.

## Choice of John Edwards fits Kerry's new, aggressive style

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — John Kerry is back and taking his fight to Bush territory, nationally and on Jewish issues.

The presumptive Democratic candidate for president ended months of speculation with his announcement Tuesday that Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) would be his running mate.

The significance for Jewish voters lies less in what Edwards offers Jews than in the fact that his selection fits a dramatic shift in how the Kerry campaign talks up Israel issues. In

both cases, Kerry is coming out of a defensive posture and going on the offensive in President Bush's comfort zones.

In choosing Edwards, Kerry ignored those who said Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), a longtime labor advocate, would shore up the traditional Democratic base. With Edwards, Kerry strikes at Bush territory in Edwards' native South and in Midwestern states where Edwards' message on

job creation and his rags-to-riches life story resonated in the Democratic primaries.

"I think the most exciting thing is that

*Continued on page 2*

**NEWS  
ANALYSIS**

## ■ Pro-Israel groups give Edwards high marks for his votes on the Middle East

*Continued from page 1*

we see something akin to Clinton-Gore in 1992: This looks forward-looking in a way you don't get from Bush and Cheney," said Steve Rabinowitz, a strategist who works for Democrats and the Jewish community. "It will help with the disenfranchised, the rural and the working class — what Edwards called the 'other America.'"

Rabinowitz said Edwards would help among rural voters in Ohio and blue-collar voters in Pennsylvania — both swing states where significant numbers of Jewish voters also could help tip the balance.

Regarding his outreach to the Jews, Kerry had to decide between a defensive and offensive posture. Until mid-June, he hewed to a line Democrats had touted for the past two years: A Democratic candidate could cede the Israel high ground to President Bush because domestic issues still would keep Jews in the Democratic camp.

There was a dramatic shift late last month, when the campaign e-mailed Jewish supporters talking points that went beyond agreement with Bush on his pro-Israel initiatives — including Bush's recognition in April of some Israeli claims in the West Bank and his rejection of a Palestinian refugee "right of return" to Israel — and emphasized Bush's vulnerable areas in the U.S.-Israel relationship.

On Israel issues, Edwards was among the stronger candidates on what was a strongly pro-Israel short list. Edwards' term in the Senate has been marked by a good voting record, pro-Israel lobbyists say, and he has made much of his presence in

Israel in 2001 when a suicide bomber attacked a Jerusalem pizzeria.

In its first posting on the announcement, the Kerry campaign alluded to Edwards' pro-Israel credentials, noting his meetings with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy.

Outlining his policies in a statement to JTA in January — a time that the Bush administration was saying Israel's policy of assassinating terrorist leaders was unhelpful to peace efforts — Edwards emphasized Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist groups.

Edwards has been strong on hemming in Israel's regional enemies, supporting bills that limit trade with Syria, Libya and Iran. On domestic issues, Edwards and Kerry share virtually the same record on issues Jewish voters tend to care about: health care, abortion rights and job creation.

Choosing Edwards may help assuage Jewish concerns arising from Kerry's missteps early in his campaign, when he appeared to criticize Israel's West Bank security barrier and when he proposed as Middle East negotiators figures who were anathema to many supporters of Israel.

"John Edwards will be able to energize the Jewish community," said Lonnie Kaplan, a former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, who has met with Edwards several times. "He'll be able to communicate in a way that will let the community be at rest that the security of Israel is not an issue in this campaign."

Edwards will be the keynote speaker at the lead Jewish event launching the Democratic convention on July 25. The event will be hosted by an array of national Jewish groups, including the United Jewish Communities and AIPAC.

The switch from defensive to offensive postures is typical of Kerry's earlier campaigns: Keep a low simmer until late in the game, then strike hard at the other side.

That strategy won Kerry re-election to the Senate in 1996, when he came from behind to defeat former Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, and it helped propel him to early primary victories this year after he had been rated last by some polls.

According to polls ahead of the Novem-

ber vote, the Jewish swing toward Bush has not been as great as some Democrats had feared, but Jewish Democrats still fret that complacency could cost them dearly in November, especially in swing states where the Jewish vote could make the difference.

Kerry's talking points on Israel outlined three areas where Bush may be vulnerable:

- Kerry, like Edwards, is unequivocal in his rhetorical support of Israel's right to retaliate against terrorist groups. "Kerry supports Israel's right of self-defense to eliminate threats to its citizens," the talking points say.

- The Kerry campaign singles out Saudi Arabia for criticism, a potential weakness for Bush, whose family has longstanding ties with the Saudi royal family. "John Kerry has forcefully spoken out against anti-Semitic statements by Saudi government officials, saying it calls into question their

commitment to combating terrorism and pledging that as president, he will never permit these kinds of attacks to go unanswered," the document says.

- Kerry repeats his support for moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Bush repeatedly has used his presidential prerogative to delay such a move.

Of course, such tactics are typical of challengers, who do not have to make the choices of an incumbent: President Clinton also resisted the move to Jerusalem, and emotionally identifying with the need to strike back at terrorists is not the same as dealing with the diplomatic consequences of such attacks.

But the effectiveness of the renewed Democratic campaign among Jews, and of the choice of Edwards, was reflected in the Republican Jewish response to the Edwards announcement.

In its statement Tuesday, the Republican Jewish Coalition was able only to cite two votes against foreign aid packages — in 1999 and 2000 — that Edwards opposed because of provisions unrelated to their Israel components. The emphasis of the Republican critique, instead, was that Edwards lacks "national security and foreign policy experience."

Notably, that was the stick Democrats used in 2000 to beat a Texas governor named George W. Bush.

**'John Edwards will be able to energize the Jewish community.'**

**Lonnie Kaplan**  
Former AIPAC President

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# U.S. congressional staffers go to Israel

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The two young American congressional staffers sandwich themselves behind a desk in the cramped Knesset office, marveling at how much work gets done in such a small space.

"This is our office," Knesset parliamentary aide Yaniv Aronowich tells his guests, Zachary Prager, a legislative assistant for Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) and Rebecca Gale, a legislative assistant to Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas). "It's, umm, tight," he says, as they crowd together.

Prager, 24, and Gale, 23, are part of a group of 13 young Jews who work on Capitol Hill who came to Israel as part of birthright israel, which provides free trips to Israel for Diaspora youths aged 18-26. Several Knesset parliamentary aides traveled with them as they toured Israel, and the Israelis took the Americans on a behind-the-scenes tour of Israel's Parliament.

"This is an elite group of future leadership, both in the United States and their communities," said Gideon Mark, birthright's spokesman.

The trip, which began last week, is part of several niche tours birthright only recently began offering in an effort to appeal to as wide a young Jewish public as possible. Other tours have been geared toward those interested in business and education.

By the end of this summer, some 70,000 birthright participants will have been brought on 10-day guided tours of Israel, according to Mark. For many, it is their first trip to Israel.

Birthright is designed to strengthen youths' Jewish identity and connections to Israel, and it is funded by a group of Jewish philanthropists, the North American Jewish federation system and the Israeli government.

Gale, who works in Congress on issues ranging from education to the rebuilding of Afghanistan, says coming to Israel on a trip that focuses on politics will help her better understand the Middle East, a region she hopes to work on in the future.

The trip "is a good opportunity to get a more esoteric knowledge of Israel's political process," she says.

Ari Goldberg, who lived for several years in Israel and now works for Ber-

man, helped organize the trip after he realized that many young Jewish congressional staffers had never been to Israel. In their jobs, they are relied upon for drafting remarks read in the U.S. House of Representatives, writing speeches and drafting policy positions, so it's important they see and understand Israel for themselves, he said.

"These people have the ears of some very important people," Goldberg says as he accompanies the group on their tour of the Knesset.

A glass-and-wood divider separates the work space of Aronowich's boss, Chemi Doron, a Knesset member from the Shinui Party, from his two aides. Inside the small office, Aronowich helps draft legislation and motions and follows up on work from the five committees on which Doron sits.

It is in offices like this that much of the government's nitty-gritty work is done.

Prager and Gale, each of whom are one of about eight staffers in their respective offices, are incredulous at the workload Aronowich — who also goes to law school — must carry.

They are also taken aback that lobbyists can sit in on committee meetings and that Israeli lawmakers do not have geographic constituencies, but rather are held accountable only to their parties.

Peeking into a packed budget committee meeting on the privatization of ports, they also are surprised to see that hardly anyone is wearing a suit.

But the appearance of the Knesset parliamentary aide is not so unlike that of the congressional staffer, Gale notes.

The U.S. congressional staffers were amazed at the workload of one Israeli Knesset staffer — who also was in law school.

"There is a look to a staffer — harried, a little bit rushed, but friendly. They definitely have that look here," she says.

The only Republican staffer on the trip is Jay Fahrer, 26, the legislative director for the office of Rep. Scott Garrett (R-N.J.). For Fahrer, the trip to Israel was about both learning more about his Jewish heritage and the political landscape of the country.

Israel is one of the issues he handles in his office, and he says he wanted to see the country for himself in order "to see what is going to happen in the future, what are the options," and to "see what actual citizens' feelings are."

Sitting at a long table in an empty room usually reserved for committee hearings, the group sits with Doron, one of the Shinui Knesset members, and asks him a series of questions, from how Israel handles the environment to prospects for peace and the debate over the West Bank security barrier.

Among those asking questions is Jeffrey Lieberman, 25, the press secretary for Rep. Steven Rothman (D-N.J.). He is one of three staffers from Rothman's office on the trip. Rothman sits on the foreign operations subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, which helps decide how foreign aid is distributed.

Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, followed by Egypt.

"It's an incredible opportunity," Lieberman says. Seeing Israel "is entirely different. Back home all you hear about is bombing after bombing."

## Clinton to Bush: Watch the Mideast

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton said he told President Bush that Israeli-Palestinian peace should be one of his top three foreign-policy priorities.

Clinton told CNN on Thursday that he told Bush during the transition in January 2001 that Osama bin Laden should be his top concern and that he regretted not capturing the terrorist chief during his

own term in office.

Clinton also recommended focusing on Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Clinton said Bush did not respond to his presentation, possibly because Bush's advisers saw Iraq as a priority.

"I had presented him with a very different world view than he had been getting from these other folks," Clinton said.

# Critics attack Hungarian Jewish group

By BALINT MOLNAR

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Fifteen years ago, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe ushered in an era of rejuvenation for Hungarian Jews, with new schools, youth organizations, growing synagogues and mounting confidence.

But the heady optimism of the early 1990s seems to have waned.

Today, many prominent Hungarian Jews believe the Jewish community has become religiously and culturally stagnant.

"We did witness a time of revival in Jewish life during the early 1990s, but that subsided around 1994," said Gabor Szanto, editor in chief of the Jewish political and cultural monthly Szombat, or Shabbat.

"Those who are active in the community are getting older, and young people are not attracted to what the community offers them," he said.

Estimates of Hungary's Jewish population run from 54,000 to 130,000. About 90 percent live in the capital, Budapest, and the vast majority is secular.

Assessing the reasons for the sense of stagnation, critics point not only to the lingering effects of the Holocaust and several decades of Communist rule but also to the Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Communities, an umbrella body that they call undemocratic and monopolistic.

"This is a centralized system, which in reality only represents a fraction of Hungarian Jews but controls most of the money," said Ferenc Olti, a former vice president of the alliance and a board member of the European Council of Jewish Communities.

Olti created a stir in 2002 when he called for the resignation of Gusztav Zoltai, the alliance's executive director. In the end, it was Olti who was booted from the organization.

Olti said the alliance represents only about 5,000 to 6,000 dues-paying members. That means that about 95 percent of Hungarian Jews are not part of organized Jewish life, he said.

Zoltai, who has been at the helm of the alliance for 12 years, denies that the alliance is providing poor leadership and said that, in any case, reforms are in the works. In April, the alliance adopted a new constitution at the urging of the group's new chairman, Andras Heisler,

who was elected on a reformist platform.

"The new constitution includes many changes that will have significant effects on the future of the Jewish community," Heisler said.

The new constitution creates a more structured and transparent organization when it comes to decision making procedures and financial management, he said.

"The new system is also more democratic, as it delegates some of the decision making from the management to the elected leadership," he said. "By involving non-member organizations we are also cautiously opening toward a wider segment of the Jewish community."

Zoltai too emphasized the importance of engaging other Jewish organizations.

"One of the most important changes is the option for non-members to have delegates participating in our assembly meetings. They now have consultational rights, but of course they cannot vote," he said.

The Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Communities is the sole representative of Hungarian Jews vis-a-vis the government, which provides it with \$15 million annually. The alliance provides funding to synagogues and employs most rabbis.

The new constitution addresses some of these issues as well, Heisler said.

"Now the election of rabbis is back to the hands of congregations and it's not done anymore from the headquarters," he says.

But critics are leveling other charges as well. In the March edition of his magazine, Szanto accused the community's leadership of fostering an atmosphere of fear and suspicion among ordinary Jews by constantly evoking the specter of the Holocaust in their public statements.

"Most of their statements make it appear as if Jews were in continuous danger in Hungary, while in reality the number of those harboring real ill will toward Jews is no more than 10 to 15 percent — the same as elsewhere in Europe," he wrote.

After the fall of communism, Hungary recognized four "historical churches" — the Catholic, Reformist and Evangelical Churches, and the Alliance of Hungarian

Jewish Communities, which became the official representative body of Hungarian Jewry.

"There is a need to revisit the current system," Olti said. "The Jewish community is different; it is more diverse."

He noted that the alliance does not accept Reform Jews or Chabad-Lubavitch Jews as members, and just a small segment of Conservative Jews.

Zoltai says the alliance represents only the Orthodox community because the Reform movement does not accept halachah, or Jewish law, which serves as the basis for membership in the alliance. He explained that Chabad is excluded from the alliance because "they do not operate as a congregation but rather as an association."

Szanto and Olti expressed skepticism about the recent revision of the constitution. "The changes are cosmetic," Szanto said.

Heisler disagreed with the critics.

Of course the alliance "defines itself as a religious body, and it is also a fact that most religious Jews in Hungary belong to the older generation," he said. "But the continuous development of our schools and our university, plus our support for various youth groups, shows that we do try to engage younger people as well."

"People who say that the new constitution does not bring significant changes probably did not read it and continue to build their criticism on their own stereotypes."

There have been some efforts to create communal Jewish life outside the bounds of the organizational mold.

One such initiative is the Hillel Educational and Youth Center Foundation, led by Linda Ban. Ban said that criticizing the community's official leadership is not a constructive way forward.

"My top priority is ensuring the future of Hungarian Jewry, which can only be achieved through education," she said. "First, we have to make young people understand that being Jewish does not necessarily equal living by strict religious rules. Yes, I do teach them about religious practice and tradition, but I never try to make them feel as if I expected that they actually lead their lives by them."

**'The changes are cosmetic.'**

**Gabor Szanto**

Szombat magazine

# Community forces out chief rabbi of Prague

By MAGNUS BENNETT

PRAGUE (JTA) — Prague Jewish community representatives have dismissed their chief rabbi after concluding that the former Communist dissident and playwright was not carrying out his duties satisfactorily.

The controversial decision to remove Rabbi Karol Sidon, 61, was taken at a meeting Monday of the community's highest representative body. It followed a recommendation made by the community's representative board.

Sidon reacted angrily to the move. He will remain chief rabbi of the Czech Republic after securing the support of the country's Federation of Jewish Communities.

Prague community chairman Tomas Jelinek told JTA that community representatives had reached the conclusion that Sidon, who is Orthodox, was not able to fulfill the responsibilities of his position as Prague's chief rabbi.

"I don't want to comment on all the reasons for the dismissal because it is an internal issue, but I can say that his failure to run the office successfully was limiting the future development of the Prague Jewish community," Jelinek said.

Jelinek said he had stated before recent community elections that the city's rabbinate needed to be overhauled.

"Rabbi Sidon has not been able to do his job as a chief rabbi properly, and he failed in all important aspects of what his office is expected to do," Jelinek said. "There was criticism from the left and the right. He was running the rabbinate in such a way that it would never have religious authority."

Sidon said he was convinced that his dismissal was politically motivated following the recent electoral success of a coalition, headed by Jelinek, that swept into power in the Jewish community on a ticket of a more open and democratic community.

"Basically, I think this is about eliminating the chief rabbi and his post from a religious point of view and creating a situation where there is no rabbi and where only the community chairman has executive power," Sidon said. "I am convinced that my dismissal is about people grabbing power, and my role and my competence was standing in their way."



Magnus Bennett

Rabbi Karol Sidon, right, performs a wedding in Prague's Jubilee Synagogue in 2001.

Some community representatives expressed concerns at the manner in which Sidon was removed from office. Jakub Roth, a member of the community's highest representative body, said he felt the question of Sidon's tenure could have been handled in a more private and sensitive manner.

"The problem for me was not the substance of Rabbi Sidon's dismissal, but the process," Roth said. "What I felt was completely unnecessary was the public humiliation that took place for what was a minor work issue."

Sidon, whose Jewish father died in the Holocaust, converted to Judaism 25 years ago shortly after becoming a leading dissident in the former Communist regime. He also became a famous figure in Czech society for writing plays such as "God's Bar" and "Abraham's Return."

The Communist authorities forced Sidon out of the country in 1983, and he returned in 1990 after the regime fell. He was appointed Czech chief rabbi in 1992.

Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, said the federation agreed this week to keep Sidon on as the country's chief rabbi because he was widely seen as a moral authority.

"Rabbi Sidon is a symbol for us, as he

was when we offered him the job of chief rabbi 10 years ago," Kraus said. "He was somebody who represented the Holocaust because he was born in 1942 and his father died in a concentration camp. He remains a moral authority with the Czech public."

Kraus added, however, that perceptions about Sidon were not the same within the community as outside it. "Rabbi Sidon's wider role in Czech society is different from that in the community. There is a difference between having someone who is a moral authority and someone who is seen every day in the community as a clerk doing day-to-day organization," he said.

Several Orthodox rabbis currently working in Prague will share the responsibilities of the rabbinate until a replacement is found. Jelinek said there were no plans in the short term to replace Sidon.

"I expect that three rabbis will serve the community until a young man who is studying to be an Orthodox rabbi in Israel returns within the next two years. The three rabbis who are here will be able to compete for the post of chief rabbi when the time comes," he said.

Sidon's future may lie in Slovakia. Sidon confirmed this week that representatives of Bratislava's Jewish community had approached him recently regarding a possible move there.



# Netanyahu backs centralized restitution

By JOE BERKOFISKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israeli Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has joined the fray in the battle over the multimillion-dollar Swiss banks Holocaust settlement.

Netanyahu, in a June 30 letter to Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the umbrella organization of Holocaust reparations groups, said he supports a proposal to form a commission to centralize restitution efforts globally.

"I appreciate and agree with your proposal to establish a blue-ribbon panel to examine how to increase efficiency, transparency, relevance and coordinate in restitution efforts," Netanyahu wrote.

His letter comes in the wake of initial calls for such a panel by Israel Singer, president of the Claims Conference, which distributes reparations and is one of the World Jewish Restitution Organization's leading constituent members.

While it does not mention the Swiss case, Netanyahu's letter and calls for a central restitution panel come in the wake of heated competition over some \$650 million remaining in the Swiss banks case by scores of Jewish organizations worldwide.

Judah Gribetz, an adviser to the U.S. court overseeing the landmark 1998 class-action settlement, has proposed that 75 percent of the remaining money be spent on the world's poorest Holocaust survivors in the former Soviet Union.

Many groups have fought that plan, contending that it ignores the pressing needs of poor Holocaust survivors elsewhere.

Bobby Brown, director of international affairs for the World Jewish Congress and a former Netanyahu adviser, said the Gribetz proposal, submitted to U.S. District Court Judge Edward Korman of the Eastern District of New York, departed from longtime efforts to achieve "balance" in compensation among survivors worldwide.

"The recommendation by Gribetz to Korman creates a very, very different balance," Brown said.

Elan Steinberg, executive vice president of the World Jewish Congress and a Claims Conference board member, called the Netanyahu letter "an important step in solidifying Jewish unity" around restitution issues.

"It is not only long overdue, but a signal

to the outside world that Jews are united and determined to remain united on this question," Steinberg said.

This was not the first time Israeli officials weighed in on the case. Israel's minister of Diaspora affairs, Natan Sharan-sky, famous as a onetime Prisoner of Zion in the Soviet Union, has urged that more funds go to Israel.

It was only early last month that two senior Claims Conference officials urged Gribetz to find a "more equitable" solution in the Swiss banks case, marking the first time members of that group took a public position in the case.

That letter, by Roman Kent, the Claims Conference treasurer, and Moshe Sanbar, chairman of the executive board, came some two months after groups from around the world converged on Korman's Brooklyn courtroom to appeal for funding from the remaining settlement.

So far in the \$1.25 billion Swiss case, about \$155 million, an average of \$170,000 per award, has gone to survivors or the heirs of assets deposited in Switzerland before the Holocaust, which the supposedly neutral banks froze in the postwar years.

Up to \$593 million has been earmarked for that group or others affected, including Swiss refugees and slave laborers.

But legal disputes and bureaucratic wrangling has held up much of that disbursement. Only in the past few weeks did the Swiss banks agree to publish online the names of thousands of additional potential recipients as well as consider appeals by thousands of others whose claims are based on partial documentation.

Among the largest proposals to Korman for the remaining funds came from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, or JDC, which oversees the funding of social services for poor Jews in the former Soviet Union.

Some critics of the Korman plan say Netanyahu's letter provides new ammunition against putting much of the remaining money in the JDC's hands.

"To the best of my knowledge, the only group that feels it's a correct balance is

the JDC," Brown said. But JDC officials say the plan in fact redresses an imbalance.

Steven Schwager, executive vice president of the JDC, said that of the \$2.9 billion distributed to Nazi victims worldwide between 2001 and 2003, only 4.5 percent — about \$130 million — went to Jews in the former Soviet Union.

If the proposed committee urges a new Swiss plan, Schwager added, it should consider that the "poorest and

neediest" of survivors worldwide remain in the former Soviet Union, where social services remain scanty.

"A new initiative to equalize services to all needy Nazi victims worldwide can only mean that victims in the FSU ought to receive upgraded help and services on a higher level than that they receive today," Schwager told JTA.

Not only do groups differ over which survivors are neediest, but they debate demographics as well, with estimates of survivor population figures varying widely.

According to various recent surveys, their numbers globally range from 687,900 to 1.92 million, with between 39 and 47 percent in Israel; between 13 and 23 percent in the former Soviet Union; 15 to 17 percent in the United States; 17 to 21 percent in Europe and 2 to 5 percent elsewhere.

"At what point will Israel have a say — when we have 80 percent of the survivors?" Brown said.

The creation of a new commission overseeing Holocaust assets could avoid potential "duplication" between groups such as the Claims Conference and the World Jewish Restitution Organization, he added.

Claims officials said their board will discuss the blue-ribbon panel during its annual meeting in New York on July 21-22.

Meanwhile, another restitution battle is brewing in Israel.

A Knesset committee is considering a proposal by Justice Minister Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, head of the Shinui Party and a Holocaust survivor, to create a non-profit entity to decide the fate of unclaimed Israeli assets.

**'At what point will Israel have a say — when we have 80 percent of the survivors?'**

**Bobby Brown**  
World Jewish Congress

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## New book helps immigrants learn German — and Yiddishkeit

By TOBY AXELROD

**B**ERLIN (JTA) — Why not pick up a little Judaism while learning German?

For the first time, a new textbook for Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants here will offer just that combination.

"Pluspunkt Deutsch fuer juedische Einwanderer" — "Extra-Credit German for Jewish Immigrants" — will add a twist to the standard language text by the Berlin-based Cornelsen Publishing company.

The project is the brainchild of Rabbi Gesa Ederberg, leader of the Jewish congregation in Weiden, a small city in Bavaria. It is supported by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the School for Adult Education in Weiden.

Instead of merely introducing newcomers to life in Germany, the book includes information about the synagogue and community center, kosher food and Jewish holidays.

The goal is to help speed the integration process and step in before Christian missionary groups have a chance to gain a foothold among the immigrants.

The Central Council, Germany's Jewish umbrella organization, will purchase part of the initial run of 6,000 books when they come out later this year.

As Germany's Jewish population has tripled to more than 105,000 since 1989 due to the arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union, it's about time such a text was available, said Stephan Kramer, general secretary of the Central Council.

"It's the first such textbook for a language course with a focus on religious matters," Kramer said. "It combines the important task of learning the German language with promoting Jewish basics. Language and religion are our major challenges in terms of integration."

Integration has proved both a challenge and a boon.

The book promises to be a useful tool, its sponsors said.

## Democratic platform addresses Mideast

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Democratic Party wants to send the right message to American Jews about its priorities in the Middle East, but its platform fails to include several positions Jewish groups recommended.

The platform, being revised this weekend in Miami, resolves to uphold the close relationship between the United States and Israel, according to sources who have reviewed the relevant sections. It also negates a Palestinian refugee "right of return" to Israel and says the armistice line ending Israel's 1948 War of Independence — known as the Green Line — cannot be the basis for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, implicitly recognizing some Israeli claims to the West Bank.

"It is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice line of 1949," the draft reads.

However, the platform ignores calls from several Jewish organizations to explicitly endorse the "road map" plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace, support Israel's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank and justify Israel's West Bank security fence.

"A party platform is not supposed to specifically negate or support every item of a country's agenda at the moment," said Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), who helped write the Middle East section of the platform. "The language that is contained in the platform is entirely consistent and supportive of the 'road map.'"

The American Jewish vote is being watched closely in this year's presidential election largely because of President Bush's support for Israel and Jewish approval of the policy positions Bush has laid out in the Middle East.

The platform could be an opportunity for Democrats to solidify their traditional base of American Jewish support with policy positions that match Bush administration support for Israel.

The American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League laid out policy recommendations for both political parties last month that included support for

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan.

No word is expected on the Republican platform until next month — the Republican convention isn't until the end of August, a month after the Democrats' — but Bush already has endorsed Sharon's plan.

The American Jewish Committee also advised the platform committees to endorse the road map that the United States crafted with the United Nations, European Union and Russia, and to express support for Israel's right to construct its security fence. The fence has drawn fire because it juts beyond the Green Line in some areas into land the Palestinians want for a future state.

"What we came to say is, in these cases, you should be supporting these things," said Rabbi Gary Greenebaum, executive director of the American Jewish Committee's Los Angeles chapter, who addressed the Democratic platform committee last month in Santa Fe, N.M.

He said he told the platform's writers that "the Jewish community is watching this very closely, very carefully."

Instead, the draft platform forsakes such details for more general themes.

"We will ensure that under all circumstances, Israel retains the qualitative edge for its national security and the right to self defense," the draft reads.

Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, said it's unrealistic to expect the Democratic Party to go into great detail in its platform because it must touch on so many topics. Platform crafters still hope to streamline the document this year.

The current platform reinforces aspects of the 2000 Democratic Party platform, including support for Israel's qualitative edge in national security.

Those who have seen the draft say it also reiterates Democratic support for Jerusalem as Israel's capital and a commitment to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Democrats say a fuller exposition of their views on Israel may be found in statements that the campaign of Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive nominee for president, put out late last month to Jewish supporters.

**'The Jewish community is watching this very closely.'**

**Gary Greenebaum**

American Jewish Committee

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Ridge cancels Israel trip

The U.S. homeland security secretary canceled a trip to Israel. Tom Ridge canceled the trip, slated for next week, because of a heightened level of warnings that terrorists might strike in the United States before the Nov. 2 presidential election.

Ridge was due to visit Israel to discuss counterterrorism and cooperation on homeland security. He would have met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and toured Israel's security business sector.

### Kerry is for faith-based initiatives

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said he would expand faith-based initiatives if elected president.

Kerry, the presumptive Democratic nominee, would establish a presidential advisory group to expand participation of faith-based groups in government programs, according to a campaign document published this week.

Orthodox Jewish groups support President Bush's executive orders mandating such initiatives, but other national Jewish groups oppose them, saying they blur church-state divisions.

Kerry said he would rewrite the orders to ensure that money not go to proselytizing.

### House to mark AMIA anniversary

The U.S. House of Representatives is expected to condemn the 1994 attack on an Argentine Jewish center and raise concerns about its investigation.

The resolution, introduced by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), calls on the U.S. and Argentine governments to bring those responsible for the bombing in Buenos Aires to justice. The resolution is expected to be voted on in the next few weeks. The July 18, 1994, attack on the AMIA community center killed 85 people.

### Bush meets Moroccan king

President Bush discussed Middle East peace with King Mohammed VI of Morocco.

"The president and His Majesty discussed ways Morocco can exert its leadership and privileged position of trust and confidence to help advance the cause of Middle East peace," the White House said in a statement after Thursday's meeting.

### Israeli rep fired

Israel's consul general in New York was fired. After receiving monthly extensions in his post for the past six months, Alon Pinkas received a notice informing him that his tenure would be up by the end of July.

Pinkas then offered a letter of resignation Wednesday to Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom — a copy of which JTA obtained — complaining about the way he had been treated.

A former adviser to several foreign ministers, Pinkas was appointed to the New York post in December 2000 under Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Sharon, Peres to discuss unity

Ariel Sharon invited Shimon Peres to discuss the possibility of a national unity government.

The Israeli prime minister and the Labor Party head are expected to meet Sunday. The invitation was made Thursday as Israel honored Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, on the 100th anniversary of his death.

### Al-Aksa to Arafat: Reform

The Al-Aksa Brigade wants Yasser Arafat to relinquish some powers and purge the Palestinian Authority of corruption.

The Washington Post published excerpts Thursday from a 10-page proposal by the terrorist wing of the Palestinian Authority president's Fatah movement.

The document, which says Arafat's simultaneous leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization is "inconceivable," is the most dramatic evidence to date of internal pressures on Arafat to reform.

But U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the United States would not take seriously calls for reform from a terrorist group.

### Pro-Palestinian activist deported

An Israeli court ruled that an American detained for her pro-Palestinian activities could be deported.

The court ruled Thursday that Anne Robinson-Peter, who has been held in a cell at Ben-Gurion Airport for two weeks, could be deported for her activities with the International Solidarity Movement.

### Olmert to go to Istanbul

Ehud Olmert is expected to visit Turkey next week.

The visit by the Israeli trade minister comes as relations between Israel and Turkey have soured in recent months. It's unknown whether Olmert will meet Turkey's president. Tensions have increased over Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, Turkish criticism of that policy and reports of Israeli support of Iraqi Kurds.

## WORLD

### French town site of tolerance appeal

Jacques Chirac made an appeal for tolerance in a French village that saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

Speaking Thursday at the village school in Chambon-sur-Lignon in eastern France, the French president called on citizens to show tolerance for their neighbors and condemned recent attacks against Jewish and Muslim targets in France.

The speech was part of official celebrations leading up to Bastille Day, France's national holiday, on July 14.

During the Nazi occupation of France, Protestant villagers from Chambon and surrounding hamlets hid thousands of Jews, continuing a tradition; villagers also had protected Catholic priests at the time of the French Revolution, refugees from Alsace during World War I and Spanish Republicans in the 1930s.

### Suicide bomber's widow acquitted

A London court acquitted the widow of a British suicide bomber of complicity in his attack on a Tel Aviv nightclub.

The court on Thursday published its ruling that Tahira Tabassum did not know her husband, Omar Sharif, planned to attack Mike's Place pub in April 2003.

The decision was made last month but kept under a gag order. The jury did not reach a verdict on whether Sharif's brother and sister failed to notify authorities, necessitating a retrial.

### Nazi-hunting program expanded to Ukraine

The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Operation Last Chance will be expanded to Ukraine. Efraim Zuroff, director of the center's Israel office and coordinator of Nazi war crimes research, announced this week that the program will start in Ukraine in late fall.

No suspected war criminals have been tried in Ukraine since it gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.