

IN THE NEWS

Cabinet OKs relocation deal

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet approved a bill to compensate Israeli settlers slated for evacuation.

Thirteen government ministers voted Sunday in favor of the compensation package of up to \$500,000 per settler family relocated under Sharon's withdrawal plan.

Six ministers — including five from Sharon's ruling Likud Party — were opposed.

The bill, which is to be voted on by the Knesset next month, would also subject any Gaza Strip or West Bank settlers who resist evacuation violently to a five-year prison term.

Kerry adviser pledges no pressure on Israel

A foreign policy adviser to Sen. John Kerry said a Middle East envoy for a President Kerry would not place any pressure on Israel for concessions.

Speaking to an American Israel Public Affairs Committee meeting Sunday in Hollywood, Fla., Richard Holbrooke, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, emphasized that an administration led by the current Democratic candidate for president would not negotiate with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and that Kerry supported the Gaza withdrawal plan and Israel's security barrier.

National security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, is slated to speak at the conference Monday.

AJCommittee praises Gaza withdrawal plan

The American Jewish Committee wrote to Ariel Sharon, praising his plan to withdraw from Gaza.

The move comes after the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations issued a statement last week reflecting support for withdrawal that fell short of a clear endorsement.

The AJCommittee endorsed the withdrawal plan in May but wanted to reaffirm support before Tuesday's Knesset vote on the plan, spokesman Ken Bandler said.

WORLD REPORT

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

Election forums held in shul lead to claims of partisanship

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some synagogue leaders are complaining that an arm of the Republican Jewish Coalition is holding events supporting President Bush and the Republican Party at their temples, after claiming they would hold nonpartisan educational programs about the upcoming election.

Leaders of a synagogue in a Philadelphia suburb say the Jewish Policy Center held what amounted to a pep rally for President Bush and the Republican Party in their shul. The leaders say the group did not make clear it was affiliated with the Republican Jewish Coalition when it rented space for the event and asked for the temple's mailing list, and told synagogue leaders the event would be nonpartisan.

A similar event in a Cleveland suburb in September angered several attendees, but synagogue leaders said they knew the group was aligned with the RJC.

Event organizers say temple leaders and participants should have anticipated what type of program they were getting, given the fact that conservative Jewish thinkers like Dennis Prager and Michael Medved were the headline speakers.

The controversy is the latest in what has been a contentious battle to secure Jewish votes in key swing states this election year. Jewish officials from both parties say their opponents have been working to stifle their events and prevent them from promoting their candidate to Jewish voters.

The Jewish Policy Center is the sister organization of the RJC. It is designated by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 or-

ganization, and therefore is forbidden from engaging in partisan political activities.

But attendees say the center events included only Republican perspectives and left some congregants angry. Other events planned for swing states have been thwarted after Democrats complained, a charge organizers deny.

"It was definitely not what it was billed to be," Harry Sauer, president of Har Zion Temple in Penn Valley, Pa., said of the Oct. 17 forum at his synagogue. "It was billed as a nonpartisan event and it became a Kerry-bashing, George Bush pep rally."

All synagogues and many Jewish organizations also have 501(c)3 status. These groups can hold candidate forums in which all sides are presented, and can educate voters, but cannot be partisan.

The RJC is not the only political group with a 501(c)3 arm: The National Jewish Democratic Council is aligned with the Solomon Project.

Ira Forman, who directs the NJDC and the Solomon Project, said the project hasn't held any events this fall and works to be bipartisan. He noted that the Solomon Project held events at the same time as the Republican National Convention in New York in August, and invited Republicans.

Matthew Brooks, executive director of the Jewish Policy Center and the Republican Jewish Coalition, said the center's events were not partisan.

"The Jewish Policy Center is a nonpartisan, nonpolitical think tank that addresses conservative policy issues," Brooks said. "We do not engage in partisan political politics."

Brooks did say, however, that the center

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■ *Republican Jewish group takes heat after sponsoring events billed as nonpartisan*

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does have conservative fellows who speak on conservative issues, and that the organization's goal is to have a dialogue on conservatism within the Jewish community.

Both events were titled "Liberal Roots and Conservative Solutions: A Jewish Conservative View of Policy Issues Concerning the Jewish Community."

He also said all panelists were reminded to remain nonpartisan. Brooks provided JTA with two pages of guidelines given to speakers before the event: They tell panelists they can't endorse particular candidates or refer to their election activities, and that they should avoid any activity that "promotes or argues for or against any candidates by name or by political party affiliation."

It goes on to urge panelists to limit discussions to specific policies or general public policy approaches. If panelists are asked overtly political questions, the guidelines recommend that they "artfully extricate themselves from having to give a direct answer."

Rabbi Jay Stein of Har Zion said he felt the panelists were promoting the Republican Party and demonizing the Democrats.

At both events, the Jewish Policy Center rented space from the synagogue, and temple leaders made clear that the event was not endorsed by the synagogue.

Stein said he wasn't told the title of the event when he agreed to rent space. While he knew some of the speaker's names, it wasn't clear that the event would be partisan, he said, adding that the center stressed

that it was a nonpartisan, educational group.

"I feel we were misled into thinking they could facilitate a nonpartisan event," Sauer said.

Har Zion's panel included Prager, conservative magazine editor David Horowitz, columnist John Podhoretz and analyst Daniel Pipes. Pipes was appointed by Bush to the U.S. Institute of Peace, and the other three panelists all have expressed support for the president.

Medved was introduced as the moderator and was supposed to give a Democratic perspective. But observers said Medved was not fair, presenting the liberal arguments sarcastically.

"Medved clearly came in with a bias," Stein said. "You could see it from the way he was presenting that he was trying to ridicule the left."

Stein said Horowitz was the most outlandish and overtly partisan in his commentary.

"Conservatism doesn't mean vitriolic; conservatism doesn't mean venomous," the rabbi said. "David Horowitz was just that."

Attempts to reach Medved and Horowitz were unsuccessful.

Stein said he had to leave the event early for fear of being berated by angry congregants. Over the next few days, he said, he received countless e-mails and telephone messages from upset members of his congregation.

Both Sauer and Stein did say, however,

that many other people enjoyed the event, and appreciated hearing a conservative perspective.

The B'nai Jeshurun Congregation in Pepper Pike, Ohio, held a similar event by the same name Sept. 12. According to an article in the Cleveland Jewish News, the panel — which included Pipes, Medved and several other speakers — "made no attempt to hide their pro-Republican, pro-Bush sentiments."

Several attendees wrote letters to the newspaper complaining about the event.

The temple's executive director, Ralph Rosenthal, told JTA that

he knew the policy center was aligned with the RJC when he allowed them to rent space.

"Some people raised concerns after the event, but they did not misrepresent who they were," Rosenthal said.

Forman, of the NJDC, called the policy center's activities "unfair."

"If Jewish institutions want to do something on the election, I think that's great," he said. "I encourage them to have one-on-ones with us or other surrogates."

Brooks said he has seen other activities trying to stifle a Republican response. He claims that a Cleveland-area Jewish community center allowed the NJDC to speak, but would not bring in Republicans for balance, and that Ohio State University's Hillel is hosting Cameron Kerry — the brother of presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) — and other Jewish Democratic leaders.

A Philadelphia-area rabbi had to leave an election forum early for fear of being berated by angry congregants.

JTA WORLD REPORT

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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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New conversion rules in Israel?

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's chief rabbi reportedly issued a series of sweeping new rules on conversion without Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's knowledge.

The new rules introduce a series of new demands on candidates for conversion and grant the chief rabbis exclusive control over the conversion courts, which are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office, Ha'aretz reported.

The new rules also give the Sephardi chief rabbi, Shlomo Amar, the authority to appoint all officials involved in the conversion process and give conversion courts extended powers, including the right to revoke conversions.

Tens of thousands of immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union are not considered Jewish according to Jewish law, and the new rules are expected to make their conversions even more difficult.

THIS WEEK**TUESDAY**

■ New investment opportunities in Israel are the focus of the second annual Israel High Tech and Venture Capital Conference in New York City. Showcasing some of the latest innovations from Israel, the conference will also feature panel discussions on software and information technology, life science, telecommunications and homeland security. Israeli Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to give the keynote address. Other speakers include New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi and Israel's ambassador to the United States, Daniel Ayalon.

■ The 16th annual Kosherfest trade show begins at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York City. Together with the Lower East Side Conservancy, the two-day show will sponsor a special multimedia exhibit depicting the history, culture, historic landmarks, merchants and food of the Lower East Side, the gateway to the United States for many Jewish immigrants.

■ The Global Forum Against Anti-Semitism, headed by Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, opens its plenary in Jerusalem. Claude Lanzmann, producer and director of the epic documentary film "Shoah" will be the guest of honor at the two-day meeting.

WEDNESDAY

■ "Three Weeks in October," a new exhibit about the 1973 Yom Kippur War, opens at the Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City. The exhibit displays photographs from the war taken by journalist Uri Dan, who served on the staff of Maj.-Gen. Ariel Sharon, the commander of Reserve Armored Division 143 in the Sinai.

■ Some 450 rare and unusual Hebraica treasures from the U.K.'s Montefiore Endowment go up for grabs at Sotheby's in New York. The auction house expects the collection, spanning eight centuries and diverse parts of the Diaspora, to fetch up to \$11 million. A 15th-century Hebrew Bible from Spain is expected to fetch up to \$350,000, and an illuminated Italian manuscript from around 1460, containing prayers and poems on life-cycle events such as marriage, circumcision and death, is expected to go for up to \$200,000.

THURSDAY

■ Grammy award-winning singer Norah Jones and guitar virtuoso David Broza are among those who will perform at a concert honoring J.J. Greenberg, who died in a 2002 cycling accident in Israel. The event at the 92nd Street Y in New York City will raise money for the Makor cultural center.

Female Jewish donors gain voice

By **RON KAMPEAS**

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Blessing a hall full of Jewish women, Susan Stern invoked a litany of matriarchs — Ruth for devotion, Naomi for dignity — and then threw out a less biblical name and concept: "Golda Meir for assertiveness."

The 1,400 major Jewish female donors, packed into the Washington Hilton for the United Jewish Communities Lion of Judah conference on Oct. 18, had been silent in shared prayer until that moment, but they laughed in agreement.

Stern, the UJC's national philanthropy chairwoman, had hit the nerve running under this gathering of Jewish female donors: Despite strides in recent decades, Jewish women still have trouble making their voices heard.

"Show the world what determined women can achieve," Carrie Rubin, a donor who spoke at the launch of the conference, said to wild applause.

The frustration bubbled under a conference bursting with accomplishment: the biggest turnout ever for such an event, and the ability to draw speakers like first lady Laura Bush and Teresa Heinz Kerry, wife of presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.).

The conference also featured top-level speakers associated with security and foreign policy issues, areas once confined to male-dominated groups.

"We could not help but be defined by defining issues," said Michele Rosen, the conference co-chairwoman, listing terrorism in Israel, the Iraq war and homeland security, among others. "The debate they generate has spilled over into this conference."

But it was the traditional women's issues, and the difficulties in bringing them to the forefront of the American and Jewish dialogues, that troubled women at the conference. Participants said driving factors in their activism and philanthropy included reproductive rights, health care and assistance for the poor and elderly.

"I cannot sit still knowing that other people's children are hungry," said Marcia Mankoff, 36, a clinical social worker from Los Angeles. "Things that touch me as a woman

and a mother are what I respond to first."

The candidates' wives split their appeals: Bush emphasized Israel and national security in her speech, stressing her husband's commitment to Israel, while Heinz Kerry drew on her own experience as a philanthropist.

Heinz Kerry cited statistics showing dramatic results in one of her projects aimed at early childhood education.

"This journey of ours, this journey of sharing and giving, is not merely noble or kind," Kerry said. "It is also immensely practical."

Both women received warm receptions, but there was little doubt the Kerry message had special resonance with fund-raisers for an organization that includes among its central tenets such items as bettering health care, education and care for the elderly.

"Those are the timeless issues," said Mankoff, who — like many others at the conference — said she intends to vote for Kerry.

Those issues have a place at the table now because of the strides women have made, speaker after speaker said.

"The influx of women and particularly Jewish women into politics has brought about a difference in substance and style to decision making," Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.)

told the conference.

Some of the women were not entirely persuaded.

"We've had tremendous headway, but there's room for more," said Cappie Abraham, a real estate developer from Chicago. "More women should be involved in the political process."

Women bring different emphases when they're in control, said Carol Amster, of Ann Arbor, Mich. Her own community chose to fund a battered women's shelter in Israel, and made more local allocations to family services, she said.

A higher profile for women is likelier in a small community such as Ann Arbor, said Amster, 69, a former executive director of the local Jewish federation. But it's harder to achieve in larger communities, where men are likelier to muscle in.

"We wait to be asked," Amster said. "We're not assertive enough." ■

More women should be involved in the political process.

Cappie Abraham
Real Estate Developer

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Shas versus Sharon

The Shas Party came out against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan.

"This plan is absolutely illegitimate. It is forbidden to vote for it! It is imperative to vote against it," the Shas spiritual mentor, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, said in his weekly sermon on Saturday.

"If, God forbid, they uproot Jewish communities, who will come to take their place? The terrorists."

Yosef's call dashed government hopes that the 11-member Shas faction would support the slated withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank when it comes up for ratification in the Knesset on Tuesday.

But Sharon still looks likely to receive the support of at least 67 out of Parliament's 120 lawmakers.

Two Gaza gunmen slain

Israeli forces killed two Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

The two gunmen, both from Islamic Jihad, died in a helicopter missile strike in Khan Younis before dawn Sunday.

Israel has stepped up aerial surveillance of the central Gaza town since local terrorist groups stepped up mortar attacks on nearby Jewish settlements last week.

Hamas kills alleged informant

Hamas killed a Palestinian it accused of helping Israel track down terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

The 19-year-old alleged collaborator was tortured, shot and dumped in Gaza City on Saturday.

Hamas said he had provided Israeli forces with information that helped them track down and kill nine of the Islamic terrorist group's leaders, including its founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

The dead man's family said he had been missing since August, apparently abducted by Hamas.

Hamas fugitive slain

Israel assassinated a Hamas master bombmaker in the Gaza Strip. Adnan al-Rul, who was on Israel's wanted list for 20 years and led efforts to upgrade the Hamas-made Kassam rockets, was killed in an air strike on his car Oct. 21.

Another senior member of the Islamic terrorist group, Imad Abbas, also was killed. Hamas responded last Friday with a salvo of mortar bombs against the Gush Katif settlement bloc, injuring at least six Israelis.

Also last Friday, a Hamas man involved in firing mortars at Gush Katif was killed and another was critically wounded by Israeli tank fire.

Doctors examine Arafat

Foreign doctors examined Yasser Arafat amid rumors the Palestinian leader has cancer.

Two separate medical delegations, one from Egypt and the other from Tunisia, have checked up on Arafat since he withdrew from public affairs last week complaining of a high fever and nausea.

Israeli media said Sunday that Arafat could have cancer, but his confidants quickly moved to quell the rumor, saying the Palestinian leader has the flu.

"The results of the Egyptian and Tunisian checkup are the same: an acute viral infection," Israeli Arab lawmaker Ahmed Tibi told Army Radio.

Building in Israel

A group of American and British design writers is in Israel to see current architectural projects.

The participants on the trip will see the inauguration of the new international terminal at Ben-Gurion Airport, which is scheduled for Thursday.

They will also see new designs built by such design luminaries as Frank Gehry and Moshe Safdie.

The trip ends Thursday.

WORLD

E.U. to help Arafat?

The European Union is reportedly launching a new Middle East peace initiative.

Following a meeting with Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Nabil Sha'ath in Brussels last Friday, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said "important events are going to take place in the coming weeks."

For his part, Sha'ath told the Palestinian daily Al-Quds on Saturday that five E.U. foreign ministers would shortly be coming to Ramallah to end the siege of P.A. President Yasser Arafat, who has long been holed up in his Ramallah compound.

The initiative is reportedly the brainchild of Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos, a former E.U. envoy to the Middle East.

In an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel on Saturday, Solana also alluded to increased E.U. involvement in the peace process, adding that Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan would not be sufficient to bring peace.

If Sharon believes that with a "pullout from Gaza everything is already done and that peace would come automatically, we won't support that," he said. "That wouldn't be a dream, but a nightmare."

Far-rightist's talk canceled in France

A French university canceled a lecture by a leading far-right politician who has been accused of Holocaust denial.

Last Friday, the University of Lyon III canceled the lecture by Bruno Gollnisch, a member of the European Parliament from the National Front, after scores of students stormed the lecture hall.

The students carried photos showing bodies from Nazi death camps as well as banners opposing Holocaust revisionists.

In recent comments to the press, Gollnisch, who teaches Japanese civilization at the school, said that he "did not deny the existence of Nazi gas chambers. But I'm not a specialist on this subject and I think we should leave the historians to discuss it. And that should be a free discussion."

NORTH AMERICA

Cajun/Israel bond

Louisiana recently invested its state pension funds in Israel Bonds after a law change allowing these funds to be invested in foreign bonds.

The \$5 million investment came after similar moves by New Jersey, New Mexico and Indiana, the Israeli newspaper Globes reported.

There are now 24 U.S. states that invest in Israel Bonds, the head of Israel Bonds, Joshua Matza, told Globes.

Anchoring Jewish history

Alaska might soon have a Jewish museum.

A fund-raiser is being held Saturday for a future Alaskan Jewish Community Center and Historical Museum, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

The Lubavitch Jewish Center of Alaska is behind the project, which would highlight the contributions of Jews to Alaska.

Groundbreaking for the project is expected to take place next year.