

IN THE NEWS
Arafat to go to Paris hospital

Yasser Arafat will be transferred to a hospital in Paris, the French president's office announced.

No details have been given on when the Palestinian Authority president is to arrive or where he is to receive treatment.

In a message to Arafat earlier Thursday, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier assured him that "France would always be at your side."

Israel prepares for post-Arafat violence

Israeli forces were put on high alert for Palestinian riots should Yasser Arafat die.

Military chiefs on Thursday boosted forces around Ramallah, the West Bank city where the Palestinian Authority president, who has been ill in recent days, has been confined to his compound.

According to security sources, army commanders were instructed to review a plan of action, written up last year, in anticipation of Arafat's death.

Israel fears Arafat, who always refused to groom a successor, will leave a power vacuum in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, triggering Palestinian factional fighting.

Israeli sources also made it clear that any request by the Palestinian Authority to bury Arafat in Jerusalem would be rejected — another source of tension that could spark civil unrest.

JAFI approves its annual budget

The Jewish Agency for Israel approved a \$290 million budget for 2005.

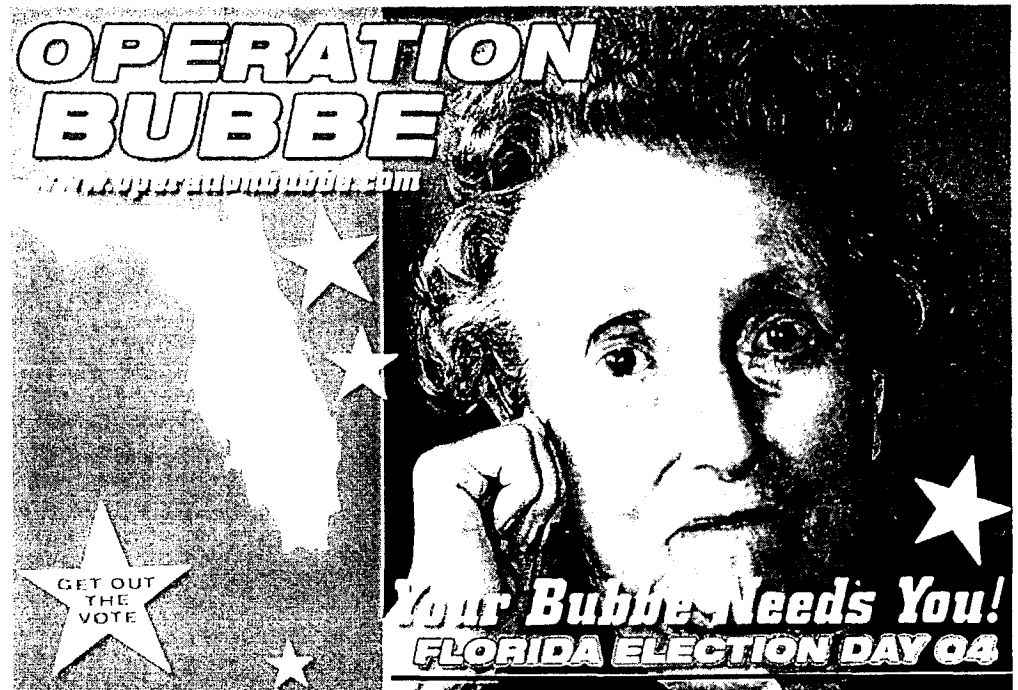
The budget, determined Wednesday in Israel by the group's board of governors, reflects a \$20 million reduction in administrative and programming costs from the previous year.

Included in the budget is an additional \$2.5 million for birth-right Israel, the free trip to Israel for Diaspora youth.

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WORLD REPORT

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



An Operation Bubbe postcard.

Debate over candidates heats up in shuls, homes, and chat rooms

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — At Kol Nidre services this year, Rabbi Elan Adler of Baltimore stood before approximately 700 worshipers and described an Israel under siege — and how his congregants should support it.

"I urge you tonight," the rabbi of Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah Hebrew Congregation, an Orthodox synagogue, said, "on this most sacred and solemn night of the year, to have Israel as your No. 1 priority when you elect a president this November. If we don't care, who should care? If we don't care, who will care? We have the vote, and we have the power to

give Israel the kind of support she needs in the White House."

In the super-heated political climate of 2004, it was bound to happen: A spiritual leader endorses a candidate from the pulpit, triggering complaints and raising questions about the role of sectarian, tax-exempt institutions in American society.

It also raised questions as to whether Israel should be the top consideration in voting for U.S. Jews.

Adler's plea for President Bush also highlights the passion running through the Jewish community this election season.

As Election Day draws near, the debates continue to be carried on in synagogues, Internet

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■ The election has pitted husbands against wives, congregants against congregants

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chat rooms, businesses, schools and kitchens across the country, with millions echoing the points made during the campaign by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Bush.

For many in the Jewish community, it is more than mere conversation.

Mik Moore is a Reconstructionist Jew who lives in Manhattan. A sometime political consultant for local candidates in New York City elections, Moore said he felt he wanted to do more than simply cast his vote Nov. 2 in a state that likely would not be in real contention this presidential contest.

So he and a few friends came up with the idea of going to Florida to help Jewish retirees vote.

"If we worked inside New York for the election, it wasn't going to have any significant effect," says Moore, retelling a conversation he had at a Shabbat dinner not long ago on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

"Somebody at the table said, 'Why don't we all go to Florida?'"

Enter Operation Bubbe.

The goal of the project is to bring 100 volunteers to Florida's Palm Beach and Broward counties starting Friday to help Jewish voters get to the polls on Election Day.

Many errant Jewish voters mistakenly cast their ballots in 2000 for Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan, according to reports, and Operation Bubbe is determined to prevent a repeat of a similar voting fiasco among Jewish grandmothers.

Moore said the effort is aimed at securing votes for Kerry; he believes most elderly Jews in Florida will vote for the

Democratic candidate.

In some cases, people's political choices are affecting their closest relationships.

Dr. Arthur Starr of Encino, Calif., admits that his adult son is "aghast" at his father's decision to vote for Bush.

"He has threatened to disinherit me," laughs the urologist.

Starr's wife, Barbara, hasn't gone quite as far, but she is as firm in her choice of Kerry as her husband is for the president's re-election.

"Bush is the strongest presidential supporter of Israel we've ever had, and I still don't know what Kerry stands for," argues Starr.

"Bush is a disaster domestically and got us into the Iraq quagmire," counters his wife.

"You called it a quagmire, not I," interjected her husband, who voted for Democrat Al Gore in 2000.

This is the first time the couple has been on opposite sides of the political fence in 42 years of marriage.

Hillel Zaremba works for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, or CAMERA. A resident of suburban Philadelphia, Zaremba said he has become involved in this election far more than in previous years.

Unfortunately, it may have cost him a few friendships.

Zaremba, a lifelong Democrat who says he will vote for Bush both because of the president's support for Israel and because of what he calls the Democratic Party's pandering, vitriol and swing to the fringe, said his friendships with fellow members of his Conservative synagogue have suffered as he has become a more vocal supporter of the president.

"Do you have any idea of how it feels to be in a community where your viewpoint is constantly disparaged?" he said. "There are certain relationships that I had with people that I believe have dissipated or been strained by my support for Bush. I find that incredibly saddening."

It seems that the only thing Jews can agree on this election is that passions are running high.

"With an electorate as divided as the country certainly seems to be at this point, people — especially younger folks — see an opportunity to get involved," said Andrew

Jakabovics, founder of Kiruvforkerry.com, a Web site devoted to getting Orthodox Jews to vote for Kerry.

"It is the democratization of the electoral process," said Jakabovics, a doctoral student in urban studies at MIT. The use of the Internet, in particular, has helped activists collaborate across considerable distances, he said.

The Internet also has been a forum for people in communities large and small to swap views and argue their points at any — and, for some people, all — given moments.

Sidney Perloe, a psychologist at Haverford College outside of Philadelphia, regularly posts messages on the listserv of Beth Am Israel, a Conservative synagogue outside of Philadelphia.

Congregants use the listserv to talk about everything from upcoming synagogue events to arguments for and against Israel's security barrier in the West Bank.

After 11 years heading Conservative congregation Sha'arey Israel in Macon, Ga., Rabbi Aaron Rubenstein felt comfortable "going out on a limb" on Yom Kippur when he delivered a sermon that offered a religiously informed dissent regarding Bush's action in Iraq.

Rubenstein described how the administration is guilty of the transgressions for which Jews atone on the holiest day of the year, including relying on false counsel, leading others astray and arrogance.

"This was rumbling inside me and I had to say it," said Rubenstein, who did not endorse Kerry in his speech. "Sometimes a sermon should be a social critique. You have to challenge the status quo."

Many of his congregants felt otherwise. According to the synagogue's president, Sheila Elkon, some felt "captive," and one has threatened to leave the shul.

Rubenstein is mulling over his decision to give the sermon. "It may have been a mistake. People are so polarized" about the war, he said.

"But I'm not sure," he continued. "I don't think the words themselves were polarizing. I think people are already polarized." ■

(The Baltimore Jewish Times, j. the Jewish news weekly of Northern California, the Atlanta Jewish Times and JTA correspondent Tom Tugend in Los Angeles contributed to this report.)

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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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For Floridians, last-ditch efforts to court votes

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

BOCA RATON, Fla. (JTA) — Lenny Chesal, on line to attend a rally with Sen. John Kerry, is asking for help.

"I need to convince my brother to vote for Kerry," Chesal, 47, an Internet salesman from Deerfield Beach, Fla., says Sunday as he comes to one of two Jewish-Americans for Kerry-Edwards tables along the snaking line toward the security checkpoint at Florida Atlantic University.

Mikey, a volunteer from Los Angeles, gets right to work.

"Here's what you've got to do," he says, offering Chesal some campaign literature and suggesting different approaches to starting a conversation with his brother about the Democratic presidential ticket, some he says he used on his own brother.

"Tell him, 'You know how much I support Israel, and would I vote for someone who isn't pro-Israel?'" suggests Mikey, who does not give his last name.

"I finally convinced my father," says Chesal, a stocky guy with a Florida Gators hat strewn with Kerry-Edwards buttons. "I want to be able to have talking points."

With just days to go until Election Day — and with some polls already open in the Sunshine State — the last-ditch efforts are well under way.

Surrogates and volunteers are heavily courting Jewish voters, making the case for each candidate on Israel, canvassing

neighborhoods, knocking on doors and making phone calls.

With the state so close, every vote — and every Jewish vote — counts.

But as the clock runs against them, both sides are leaning on committed supporters to engage their friends and neighbors. The personal appeal is seen as the most efficient and effective way to win over those remaining undecided voters.

The focus for Democrats is assuring Jewish voters that Kerry, a Massachusetts senator, will be strong on Israel. For Republicans, the buzz word is conversion, trying to persuade traditionally Democratic voters to back Bush because of his support for the Jewish state.

At the Kerry rally, Chesal is wearing a sticker with Kerry-Edwards in Hebrew on his shirt, but at this rally, so is almost everyone else.

African-Americans wear stickers, as do Latino voters. One sticker is placed on a sign reading "Irish-Americans for Kerry."

But no one is more decked out than Rhoda Stern-Moss, who is wearing a T-shirt with "Kerry for President" in Hebrew, adorned with numerous stickers and buttons saying Kerry is pro-Israel.

"We've been canvassing," says Stern-

Moss, 73, as she leaves the event with her husband. "We've been calling people and handing out literature."

She says many Jewish voters are asking her, on the phone and in person, what Kerry will do for Israel, suggesting they have not heard enough from the candidate himself.

"Once they hear it from me, their first instinct is to say, 'Why hasn't he said all of this,'" she says. "They are hoping to hear it, they want to vote for Kerry."

Seeing all of the Jewish signs in front of him, Kerry did speak

about Israel at the rally on Sunday.

"I will make Israel safer than George W. Bush is because I will stand up to those countries that are still supporting Hamas and Hezbollah," he said.

But two days later, those words haven't won over the crowd in Aventura.

When former New York City Mayor Ed Koch asks the largely senior citizen audience, munching on kosher turkey wraps and pickles at the Aventura-Turnberry Jewish Center, whether they are voting for President Bush, almost all of the hands go up in the air.

Koch, brought in by the Republican Jewish Coalition, may have been the biggest draw for Jews in Florida this week — until former President Bill Clinton stepped up to a synagogue pulpit on Tuesday.

Clinton told the audience at Temple B'nai Torah in Boca Raton that Kerry has not made unrealistic promises to the voters, and he touted Kerry's support for Israel.

"He walked in and the synagogue absolutely erupted," said Jeremy Ring, 34, who runs a children's charity in Boca Raton. "People absolutely hung on his every word."

Most of the candidate and surrogate events only bring out voters already on the side of the party sponsoring the event.

But Michael Fragin, a volunteer Jewish outreach coordinator for the Republican Party of Florida and the Jewish liaison for New York's Republican Gov. George Pataki most of the year, says energizing Jewish voters can make them more willing to reach out to their friends and neighbors.

"The best use of resources is peer to peer, Jew to Jew," he says.

In Florida, candidates bring out the big guns to persuade Jewish voters.



Matthew E. Berger

Mark Marmar, a volunteer for the Bush/Cheney campaign, talks to voters at the Aventura-Turnberry Jewish Center in Florida, on Tuesday.

Focus is on Israel in battle for Jewish votes

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Like two surly dinner guests who won't let an argument go, President Bush and John Kerry won't get off topic when they take their case to American Jews: It's all Israel all the time.

The prospect of swaying likely voters in a handful of battleground states has brought unprecedented attention to Jewish voters this election season, yet the discussion overwhelmingly has focused on Israel, an issue that no longer pushes Jewish buttons the way it once did.

In increasingly bitter exchanges, each campaign's surrogates and advertisements paint the opposing candidate as coddling terrorists, if not imperiling Israel's very existence.

David Harris, the American Jewish Committee's executive director, said the parties still perceive Israel as a potent issue among Jews, even as polls by the AJCommittee and others show the Jewish state declining in importance among Jewish voters.

Harris said the strategy is to nudge Jewish voters back into believing Israel is in danger — thereby returning the issue to top priority status.

"Jewish voters want to be satisfied the candidate understands the importance of the U.S.-Israel issue and will work to

strengthen it," Harris said. "If the adversary can puncture a hole in that belief, it may cause some voters to rethink their original positions."

In the final sweeps in the days before Election Day on Nov. 2, each side was attempting just such a jab.

"I will make Israel safer than George W. Bush is because I will stand up to those countries that are still supporting Hamas and Hezbollah," Kerry, the Democratic senator from Massachusetts, said in Florida on Sunday.

At the same time, his campaign distributed an appeal from legal personality Alan Dershowitz that called Bush's Middle East policies "disastrous" for Israel.

For its part, Bush's campaign distributed a Washington Post column by Charles Krauthammer suggesting that Kerry's plan to assert control in Iraq is to "sacrifice Israel" to Arab and

European nations. The notion got further reinforcement by The New York Times columnist William Safire on Monday when he asked Jewish voters who tend to vote Democratic to "give a little added weight" to Israel's security and vote for Bush.

Richard Cohen used his own Washington Post column on Tuesday to hit back: "No doubt, George Bush is a true friend of Israel. But so was Bill Clinton and so would be John Kerry," he wrote.

"The issue is not who cares more for Israel, but who can be effective in reducing the violence and bring about a peaceful solution. So far that's not George Bush."

Such high-profile appeals — from the candidates and their surrogates, made in the country's prime Op-Ed real estate — underscored the weight each side accords the Jewish vote.

That was also evident in this week's final push in Florida, culminating a month-long sweep of Jewish communities in swing states.

Republicans were running their Democratic Jewish trophy, former New York Mayor Ed Koch, through a grueling tour of synagogues and Jewish Community Centers in the southern part of the state on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Kerry campaign was bringing former President Clinton, Dershowitz, Kerry's Jewish brother, Cameron, TV comic Larry David and an array of congressmen into Fort Lauderdale and Miami on the same days.

Additionally, each side made one of its top foreign policy officials available to an American Israel Public Affairs Committee summit in Hollywood, Fla. Richard Holbrooke made Kerry's case and Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, spoke for her boss.

"Whoever wins on Nov. 2, the key role of Jewish voters must be seen as a vitally important fact of this year's election," Harris said.

Throughout the grueling and often contentious campaign, the candidates at times have gone into contortions to make their Israel bona fides.

Israel was one of a small elite of nations that made it into nomination acceptance speeches at both conventions. That didn't stop each side from accusing the other of not mentioning it enough — although there never has been a convention standard for mentioning Israel.

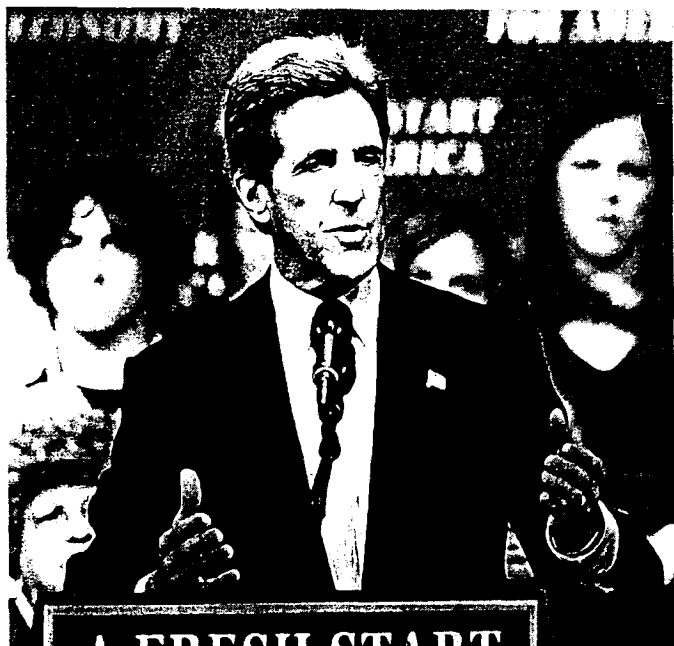
Bush and Kerry each brought Israel into the debates, managing to squeeze mentions into questions about getting troops out of Iraq, although they were never asked about it.

The sometimes vicious back-and-forth is a long way from March, when a top Bush campaign official told JTA that the campaign would pretty much leave Kerry alone on the topic, and Kerry campaign officials liked to say they were "as good" on Israel as Bush and would focus instead on domestic issues, where Democrats tend to trump Republicans among Jews.

Yet as Bush's lead in the polls started to melt with the summer and the importance of Jewish votes in battleground states increased, his Jewish campaigners switched to the Israel issue, where they believed his unprecedented closeness to Ariel Sharon's government made him almost unassailable.

The gloves soon came off. A passage from a 1997 book by Kerry

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Sharon Farmer/Kerry-Edwards 2004

Sen. John Kerry speaks at the FM Kirby Center for the Performing Arts in Wilkes Barre, Pa., on Oct. 19.

describing Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat as traveling the road from outlaw to statesman — a conventional wisdom at the time — was pared down by the campaign to omit the “outlaw” part. “Kerry called Arafat a statesman” became fodder for Bush partisans and reporters at Bush-friendly newspapers like the New York Post.

Another sign of the importance that Republicans assigned to the Israel issue was a Republican strategy document prepared in July by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.).

One section is devoted to Kerry on Israel. It rehashes his 1997 reference to Arafat, and says that Kerry expressed two “precisely opposite” reactions to Israel’s West Bank security barrier, although Kerry and Bush both changed their attitude to the fence when Israel changed its route.

The Bush campaign’s rhetoric reached such a pitch that by the end of August, senior campaign staffer and Bush’s former Jewish liaison, Tevi Troy, was telling college students at the party convention in New York that Bush’s re-election was a “life-or-death” matter for the Jews.

Democratic posturing never achieved such a fever, but Kerry’s campaign was not immune to distortions. One campaign trope is that Bush did nothing to stem Saudi funding of terrorists, although terrorism experts agree that the kingdom is rolling back the funding precisely because of pressure from the administration.

At the same time, the Kerry campaign sought to reassure Jewish voters that he will always be guided first by Israel in pursuing an international coalition to resolve the situation in Iraq and bring peace to the region.

Such pitches on Israel defy two recent major polls that showed Israel dropping as a priority for U.S. Jews.

The Jewish state ranked sixth as a factor in presidential voting in a July poll by Democratic pollster Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, behind issues like terrorism, the economy, the Iraq war and health care.

In the AJCommittee’s August poll, it ranked last when respondents were asked what they thought was the most important component of their Jewish identity.

Yet the pitches may make sense for the Republicans in the sense of the party having little else to offer the Jews, said Theodore Mann, a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

“It’s a card they had to play, knowing as they do — correctly — that Israelis prefer

Bush and thinking as they do — incorrectly — that Jews are one-issue voters,” said Mann, who is on the board of the Israel Policy Forum, a group that supports U.S. engagement in the peace process.

Republicans, of course, reject that, noting that some Jews share the Republican agenda on economic and social issues as well.

Republicans also may have had in mind the Jewish vote in Florida, a state Bush cannot afford to lose. The community is weighted to the elderly, and older Jews rank Israel

higher among their priorities.

“Israel looms much larger among the elderly,” Harris said. “If I were appealing to Jewish voters in Greenwich Village, I would approach them differently than I would in Palm Beach County.”

Bush’s apparent inability to crack the traditional 3-1 ratio of Jewish support for Democrats is frustrating some Republicans. The latest polls, taken in late summer, show Kerry winning anywhere between 69 percent and 75 percent of the Jewish vote, with Bush getting between 22 percent and 24 percent.

Senior party officials berated the



Paul Morse/Bush Campaign

President Bush addresses a crowd during the campaign.

community at the party convention for not “getting” Bush’s support for Israel, and Jewish Bush supporters got the message.

“Why is it that so many American Jews appear unconcerned about Israel’s parlous condition?” asked an editorial in a pamphlet distributed to Jewish voters by a conservative group, the Jewish Political Education Foundation.

“When judging a candidate, they prefer focusing on health care, social security, abortion rights, funding of stem cell research, gun control, deficits, etc. What can one say to complacent Jewish souls suffering from cognitive dissonance?”

Others said the campaign’s final, pitched weeks were bound to run into excesses.

“I was thinking if Jewish votes were in play, John Kerry would have been Bar Mitzvahed this weekend,” David Brooks, the conservative New York Times columnist, said on CNN over the weekend.

Brooks might have been unaware that the campaigns believe Jewish votes are indeed in play — and that Kerry might be ready for his Haftarah.

“This morning I woke up to hearing John Kerry on the radio saying Am Yisrael Chai,” Harris said, referring to Kerry’s speech in Florida this weekend in which he reaffirmed his support for Israel by calling out the Hebrew phrase for “The people of Israel live.”

“I thought I was still dreaming,” Harris said.

‘If I were appealing to Jewish voters in Greenwich Village, I would approach them differently than I would in Palm Beach County.’

David Harris

American Jewish Committee

Nonprofit aims to help Jerusalem's economy

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Although Jerusalem boasts some of the world's greatest religious and historical treasures, it remains the poorest major city in Israel.

But now, a group of investors, academics and high-tech entrepreneurs is working on a plan to jump-start the capital's economy.

For StartUp Jerusalem, the name of the game is creating "clusters" of industry — local concentrations of interconnected businesses and institutions that can stimulate job creation and growth.

Modeled after economically thriving cities that have focused on particular sectors to boost their economies — such as bio-tech in Boston and aerospace in Houston — StartUp Jerusalem hopes to attract investment and prosperity by honing in on the city's strategic assets and concentrating them into clusters.

"This can be successful," said a professor at Harvard Business School, Michael Porter, whose ideas serve as the basis for the organization's work.

"When people come together with a clear strategic framework," added Porter, an internationally renowned expert on strategic competition. "I've seen transformations."

The group's organizers are planning to focus on creating three major clusters: a health and life-science cluster including bio-tech and pharmaceutical companies; a collection of outsourcing businesses focusing on call centers, and a tourism and culture cluster that would capitalize on Jerusalem's unique assets as a religious center for Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It could take years to lift the struggling city out of poverty. About half its residents do not work, average salaries are low and more than a third of Jerusalemites live below the poverty line.

On top of that, there is a mass flight of educated young people from Jerusalem — some 7,000 Jerusalem residents are leaving the city every year, more than half of them with university degrees.

Jerusalem has also been the city hardest hit by the intifada, a target of repeated bombings of city buses and cafes. The violence has kept tourism down, once one of Jerusalem's main sources of income.

As long as the security situation remains unstable, some question the city's ability to attract investment no matter how many economic initiatives are launched.

Furthermore, some experts ask whether or not Jerusalem — a city where many of the employed work in government or university jobs in the public sector — can supply an adequate private sector workforce.

"There are attempts to push industry and high-tech, but it is just not clicking," said Rafi Melnick, a professor of economics at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. "It is possible to help Jerusalem," he said, citing new high-tech parks in the city. "But this is all on a small scale, it is not something that can change the personality of the city."

The bulk of Jerusalem's unemployed are fervently Orthodox Jews and Arab women — two sectors that traditionally have not joined the workforce.

Maya Choshen, a researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, a think tank that deals with issues concerning Israel's capital, said efforts by those at StartUp Jerusalem are welcome, but much of its success will depend on how much cooperation it can secure from city hall, the government and others.

Referring to reports of tension between Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski and Nir Barkat, StartUp Jerusalem's founder and opposition leader of Jerusalem's City Council, she said all parties in Jerusalem "need to find a way to cooperate and work together."

A Jerusalem city spokesman, Gidi Smerling, said the mayor's office has yet to be approached about the StartUp Jerusalem initiative but would be interested in hearing more about it.

Barkat, a former high-tech powerhouse who once chaired the hugely successful security software company Checkpoint, ran for mayor against Lupolianski and lost.

"There is only one Jerusalem in the world," Barkat told a packed audience at a conference Oct. 18 launching the nonprofit organization. "But the question is, are we really using the full potential we have?"

He said he and other concerned Jerusalem residents in the business world started the group because "we wanted to think out of the box — what could we do as entrepreneurs to make Jerusalem successful?"

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

supports the group's approach.

"This is real and can produce real results," Netanyahu said. "If you do not compete, your poverty grows."

Supporters of the initiative pinpointed several assets working in Jerusalem's favor, including the large amount of research money that comes into Hebrew University; the city's top-notch hospitals, leaders in fields such as cardiology and genetics; the diverse language skills of the city's residents, many of whom are immigrants, and the city's unique religious sites.

"Right now, Jerusalem has no image when it comes to economy. We need to build a business case for Jerusalem," said Porter.

The idea of creating a cluster based on outsourcing and business services derives

from the fact that Jerusalem is replete with native speakers of languages other than Hebrew, said Jafar Sabbah, who is managing the cluster for StartUp Jerusalem.

Although the city cannot compete head-to-head with call-

center powerhouses such as India, proponents say it can fit a niche for higher-end clients looking for better quality service.

For example, Sabbah said, a call-center employee in Jerusalem who is originally from New Jersey will probably have better luck selling car insurance to a customer in New Jersey than his counterpart in India who is unfamiliar with the nuances of American culture.

Sabbah, a lawyer with a masters in business administration, said call centers are a potential employment boon for Arabs in the city who could work with clients across the Arab world.

Porter repeatedly stressed the importance of the cluster. "If you can build the concentration, you can achieve extraordinary levels of production," he said.

Encouraging investors and participants at the StartUp Jerusalem launch, Steve Wesley, the California state comptroller and a former vice president of eBay, cited the model of San Diego — which went from a "sleepy naval city" to the third-largest life sciences center in the United States — as a potential model for Jerusalem.

**'We need to build
a business case
for Jerusalem.'**

Michael Porter
Professor, Harvard Business School

ARTS & CULTURE

Film recalls Argentina's 'Jewish Gauchos'

By FLORENCIA ARBISER

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — It took the directors of the new documentary "Legacy" nearly 10 years to complete the film, and by the time they had, many of the 200 aging "Jewish gauchos" interviewed had died.

Perhaps that contributed to the emotional atmosphere permeating the theater here on the evening of Oct. 14, when the film had its commercial release.

The 72-minute "Legacy" — produced by the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation and based on a concept by the group's co-founder, Baruch Tenenbaum — tells the story of 820 Jews who escaped the pogroms of czarist Russia in 1889 and landed in Argentina aboard the steamship Wesser.

The film received an extended ovation and screening and hugs were exchanged in the audience, where comments in Yiddish could be heard.

Upon arriving in Argentina, these Russian immigrant Jews, who later became known by some as "Jewish Gauchos," settled in Entre Rios, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires, where they founded colonies with the aid of European Jewish philanthropist Baron Hirsch.

Deep religious values, an intense cultural life and a strong focus on educating their children suffused the immigrants' daily struggle to tame the inhospitable brushwood.

The cooperative farms they built became models of that mode of living in Argentina.

Escorted by bodyguards, Israeli Ambassador Rafael Eldad was reflective as he left the theater.

"I think it is important to feel how rich these people were despite their poverty," he told JTA.

"They had such a deep conviction of their roots, such a stubborn will. They not only have survived. They built 'kehilot,' or communities, he said, adding that "Today, with so much plenty, we hardly keep in existence."

Business as usual at AIPAC

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

HOLLYWOOD, Fla., (JTA) — It would have been easy for Israel advocates to be distracted at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's national summit here this week.

To get to the meeting rooms at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino here, one had to venture past the slot machines and the framed guitars that have been used by rock 'n' roll greats, the Harley Davidson motorcycles on display and the waterfalls that flow into a large swimming pool.

If that didn't distract donors to the pro-Israel lobby from the work at hand, the recent rumors and innuendos surrounding AIPAC certainly didn't stop them either.

Ever since news reports said AIPAC officials were being investigated for allegedly taking a classified document from a Pentagon official and passing it on to Israel, people have been watching AIPAC very closely.

The organization has responded by dismissing the charges as baseless and continuing its mission, insiders say, and the conference this week was a testament to that.

"Business as usual" was the oft-spoken mantra.

Among supporters, at least, it seemed to be true.

"The fact that this AIPAC national summit is a record turnout, that it's our largest annual summit ever, is a tribute to the importance that people in this country place in the value of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship," AIPAC spokesman Andrew Schwartz said.

The two-day summit, which began Sunday, drew more than 800 people and brought key leaders from both political parties.

Some participants said the natural growth of the organization, combined with the heightened political season, drew participants, as well as the desire to support AIPAC just two months after it came under intense media scrutiny.

The conference was addressed by Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, and Richard Holbrooke, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a foreign policy adviser to the Democratic presidential candidate, Sen.

John Kerry of Massachusetts.

Rice's presence was particularly striking: AIPAC advocates say the fact that Rice and President Bush have spoken to AIPAC since being informed of the details of the federal investigation reportedly launched two years ago shows that the charges against the group are not serious.

"I think the U.S. officials, whether it's in the administration or Congress, realize how important relations between Israel and the U.S. are to the United States," said conference participant Mark Engel, 57, a real estate developer in New York City.

"Their feeling is, whatever may have happened with AIPAC may or may not be true, and they can't let innuendo distract them."

The controversy reportedly focuses on a Pentagon official accused of passing a classified document about Iran to two AIPAC aides, who then allegedly passed it on to Israeli officials.

Some reports have indicated that AIPAC was the target of the probe. David Szady, the senior FBI counterintelligence official investigating AIPAC, has targeted Jews in the past, JTA has reported.

Most AIPAC supporters and staff at the summit refused to speak publicly about the controversy.

Privately, supporters said they believe the investigation may have been sparked by anti-Semites in the State Department or by others who want to defame Israel.

Some said the biggest vindication comes from the fact that no charges have yet been filed. The investigation appears to have stalled, if not faded away, according to sources close to AIPAC and in Congress.

There was little mention of the controversy at the summit this week.

That was a sharp contrast to the days when the scandal first broke in late August, just before the Republican National Convention in New York.

AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr did raise the issue at one closed-door summit forum this week on "The State of AIPAC," participants said.

Kohr said he did not know where the accusations came from, and would like to know more, participants said.

Condoleezza Rice and Richard Holbrooke addressed AIPAC's national summit in Florida.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Barrage kills soldier

An Israeli soldier was killed when Palestinians fired mortars at a Gaza Strip settlement. Another six troops were wounded in Thursday's salvo against the Morag settlement.

Hamas claimed responsibility. Military sources said six mortars hit the troops' position, while Palestinian snipers tried to pick them off.

Israeli forces searched outlying areas for the attackers.

Soldiers kill Hamas terrorist

Israeli soldiers shot and killed a senior Hamas member in the West Bank.

Ibrahim Issa was killed in Kalkilya on Thursday evening. Issa, who also is a member of the Tanzim militia, was believed to be planning a series of suicide attacks in Israel, including a car bomb attack.

Issa also was involved in numerous attempts to attack soldiers manning Israel's West Bank security barrier.

Earlier Thursday evening, soldiers operating in the Jenin refugee camp shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian gunman.

Israel gets mixed media freedom rating

A media watchdog group criticized Israel for crackdowns on press freedom in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But the Jewish state ranked 36th out of 167 countries cited in the third annual Press Freedom Index issued this week by Reporters Without Borders.

While the group recognized Israel as the most liberal Middle East country when it comes to the media, it said Palestinian areas under Israeli military control ranked 115th in terms of press freedom.

However, this still beat the Palestinian Authority, which came in at 127th place. By comparison, the United States was ranked 22nd for press freedom in the world, while U.S.-occupied Iraq was 108th.

Investments up in Israeli high-tech firms

Investment in Israeli high-tech companies was up 43 percent during the first three quarters of 2004, compared to the same period last year. Ninety-one companies have raised \$438 million so far this year, said Efrat Zarkai, director of research at IVC Research Center.

The data was released this week at an Israeli high-tech conference in New York City.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. praises Knesset vote

The United States welcomed the vote in Israel's Parliament authorizing an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

"We certainly welcome the steps that move toward the implementation of this plan," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Wednesday, a day after the Knesset vote.

"We think it offers an opportunity, and we've long expressed our support for the disengagement plan, that involves settlements in Gaza and four settlements on the West Bank that we think can represent a real opportunity for progress for the Palestinians and progress along the lines of the 'road map' " peace plan.

U.S. to Israel: Leave settlements intact

The United States wants Israel to transfer intact Gaza Strip settlements to the Palestinians.

"All the parties involved, the international players, including the United States, as well as the Israelis, have been looking for a mechanism that can result in the peaceful transfer of property and the housing so that people can live there," State Department spokesman Richard

Boucher said Wednesday. "That's, in our view, the best way to handle it, and that's what we've been, I think, talking to people about in the past."

Israel's government is considering leveling the settlements when it pulls out next year, fearing an eruption of violence over who moves into the relatively luxurious homes.

Palestinians need to "have a situation where it's not a source of violence," Boucher said.

It's a (Jewish) girl thing

A program aimed at helping teenaged Jewish girls is becoming its own nonprofit.

Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing has been a program of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.

The program, which uses Jewish tradition to build self-esteem among teenage girls, is currently used at 150 Jewish institutions, including synagogues and JCCs, across the United States.

WORLD

European lawmakers eat, talk Israel

Some 100 European lawmakers attended a dinner debate in France on European Union-Israel relations.

The lawmakers at Wednesday's event, organized by the Paris-based European Jewish Congress, heard from Israel's ambassador to France, Nissim Zvilli, and chairpersons of two key E.U. committees dealing with relations with the Jewish state.

Jewish-Muslim gesture in France

A Jewish leader in Strasbourg is to lay the foundation stone for the city's grand mosque.

Driss Avachour, president of the Strasbourg Grand Mosque Association, asked Pierre Levy, the Alsace region head of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews, to lay the stone at a ceremony on Friday, Levy told JTA.

In a letter to Levy, Avachour said that "the organization of Islam in France, and particularly in Alsace, has created a climate of reciprocal trust and allowed Islam to take its place at the side of the other religions."

Unlike other regions in France, Alsace supports and funds religious institutions under the Concordat formula enacted when the region was under German control between 1870 and 1918.

Until recently, only Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religions had official recognition and received regional funds for building projects.

Barking against terror

Israel is to unveil a program under which dogs will patrol public transportation to prevent terrorist attacks. As part of Sunday's demonstration of the Pups for Peace program, 50 dogs and their trainers will demonstrate their ability to reveal explosives on public transportation.

The Belgian shepherds, Labradors, German shepherds and Dutch shepherds have been trained for six months. Some money for the program comes from the Jewish Agency for Israel, through the United Jewish Communities' Israel Emergency Campaign.

Celebrating synagogue in Tbilisi

Hundreds of people celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Great Synagogue in the former Soviet republic of Georgia.

Tuesday's celebration in Tbilisi was the centerpiece of a festival of Georgian-Jewish friendship, held under the auspices of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.

The events celebrating Georgia's Jewish heritage are being held in various locations across the Caucasus Mountains republic, including in the town of Mtskheta, established 26 centuries ago and regarded as the site of the first Jewish settlement in Georgia.