

IN THE NEWS

High court hears Ten Commandments cases

The Supreme Court sought to decide the constitutional limits on the public display of the Ten Commandments on government property.

In oral arguments for two cases Wednesday, justices questioned how the government could acknowledge the Ten Commandments' role as part of the founding of American law and government without endorsing religion. [Story, Pg. 3]

Guilty plea from Hezbollah fund-raiser

A man in Michigan pleaded guilty to hosting fund-raising meetings for Hezbollah at his house.

Prosecutors announced Wednesday that Mahmoud Youssef Kourani hosted meetings in 2002 at which a speaker from Lebanon solicited donations for the Shi'ite fundamentalist group.

Prosecutors said the money raised was intended for a program that benefits orphans of fighters killed in Hezbollah operations.

As a result of the plea bargain, Kourani faces no more than five years in prison.

Sentencing is scheduled for June 14.

Palestinians want full statehood soon

The Palestinians want to negotiate for their statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip within a year.

"If the United States wants to help end this conflict, it should bring the Israeli and Palestinian sides to the negotiating table within six months to a year to start final-status negotiations," Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei told Reuters on Wednesday.

For now, Israel intends to leave Gaza this summer while keeping large parts of the West Bank indefinitely, arguing that the Palestinians must prove they seek peaceful independence by making do with a temporary state.

WORLD REPORT

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Russian, U.S. Jewish groups form long-distance relationship

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — A U.S. Jewish group known for its historical commitment to church-state separation has forged a partnership with a Russian Jewish group known for its ties to religious Judaism.

The new partnership was formalized in Moscow on Tuesday with the signing of a memorandum between the American Jewish Congress and the Federation of Jewish Communities, a Chabad-led umbrella group that says it unites Jewish groups in 500 communities across the former Soviet Union, including 170 within Russia.

Officials with both groups said the agreement aims to combat anti-Semitism in Russia and improve U.S.-Russian relations.

The agreement also provides each group with something each wants: the AJCongress, which has been seen as declining in status in recent years, gets as its partner the most active Jewish group in Russia, while the federation gains a foothold in the mainstream American Jewish community.

The AJCongress president, Jack Rosen, and the president of the federation, Lev Levayev, agreed to work together to protect civil and religious rights of Russian Jews, consolidate efforts and resources to fight anti-Semitism and develop Russian-American and Russian-Israeli political relationships.

AJCongress leaders said they realize that it might seem odd on the surface for it to partner with a group known for promoting religion. But Rosen said religious orientation isn't an issue.

"It's not about religion. We don't have favorites. We're working with different Jewish organizations overseas," Rosen said. "The federation does excellent work on behalf of the Jewish community in the region."

If Jewish groups "that are part of the federation want to participate, we are here to lend them help," he added.

Aside from consultation on the issues and occasional joint statements, the new partnership may intensify contacts between American and Russian political leaders, Levayev, an Uzbek-born diamond merchant who now lives in Israel, told reporters on Tuesday at a news conference here.

"We should bring U.S. senators here so that they see for themselves how things have changed" in Russia, said Levayev, who has been instrumental in helping the

federation develop new Jewish institutions and programs throughout the region.

He added that this political contact eventually could help to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a 30-year-old piece of U.S. legislation linking trade policy to human rights that Kremlin officials — with whom the federation has close ties — see as anachronistic.

He said he expects some U.S. lawmakers to visit later this year, although he declined to go into specifics.

The AJCongress leaders said they believe the partnership will help Russian Jews battle anti-Semitism more effectively at a time when anti-Jewish rhetoric appears to be on the rise in this part of the world.

Rosen said the organizations scheduled this week's agreement before a recent anti-

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ACROSS THE
FORMER
SOVIET UNION

■ Partnership between U.S., Russian Jewish group set to go

Continued from page 1

Semitic letter signed by some Russian lawmakers was publicized.

"But the fact that we are doing this now is a very public statement" on how important both groups think it is to fight anti-Semitism, he said.

Jewish observers in Russia tend to agree that the issue of Russian anti-Semitism requires international pressure to be put on the Kremlin. But it may be difficult for the newly forged alliance to be critical of the Kremlin on democracy in Russia

even though many believe Russia is sliding away from a commitment to human rights.

U.S. Jewish groups are "handcuffed on the Putin issue" mainly out of fear that such direct criticism may backfire at Russian Jews, a U.S. Jewish leader told JTA on condition of anonymity.

But leaders of the AJCongress, which recently formed another, similar partnership with a French Jewish group, said that their organization is not necessarily going to agree with its new Russian partner on all political stances.

"Neither of us is giving up independence," Rosen said.

Both groups could gain from the arrangement.

This week's memorandum marks a

certain breakthrough for the federation, which has become the most influential Jewish group in the former Soviet Union and has made great strides in rebuilding Jewish communal life in the region but until recently felt it was often on the sidelines when it came to contacts with American Jewry.

Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, the federation's executive director, said the new partnership could show that the group — although directed by Chabad rabbis and supporters — is very different from what

Chabad is usually seen to stand for.

Berkowitz acknowledged that "by having a formal relationship" with AJCongress, a member of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, his group will now "have a voice in the States."

David Twersky, the director of the AJCongress-Council for World Jewry, the group's international affairs branch, spoke of a "distortion" that has taken place among American Jews.

"When the organized Jewish community in America deals with Russian Jews, it only deals with the Russian Jewish Congress," he said referring to another leading Jewish group here that until late last year was widely regarded as the federation's major competitor on political and community-building issues.

The RJC was once the pre-eminent group among Russian Jewry but it has lost influence to the federation in recent years.

The RJC's new leader, Vladimir Slutsker, is seen as an ally of the federation, and this week he tried to dispel the fears that a new partnership between the American and Russian groups would worsen the relations between the two Russian Jewish groups.

In a news release this week, the RJC welcomed the signing of the memorandum and noted it had its own partner in the U.S. Jewish community, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella organization of 52 Jewish groups.

For its part, the AJCongress, through

the federation, could enjoy increased access to Russian and political leaders throughout the region.

It was the federation — and Levayev, its politically well-connected president — who organized a Moscow meeting between President Vladimir Putin and the Conference of Presidents in June 2003.

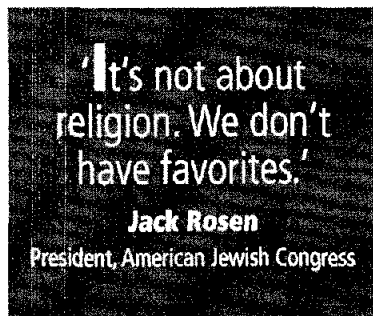
Rosen said the federation was instrumental in increasing the participation of mayors from the former Soviet Union — including Belarus and Georgia — at the annual AJCongress-sponsored mayors' conference in Jerusalem.

The Israeli government "didn't have any headway in this part of the world," Rosen said. "The federation opened the gates. Is it bad when we had a mayor from Belarus coming to a pro-Israel conference in Jerusalem?"

The new U.S.-Russian Jewish partnership did not go unnoticed by other Russian Jewish organizations.

The Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities of Russia criticized the agreement as a "publicity stunt" that the federation has undertaken in order to obtain a more legitimate status as the sole representative of Russian Jewry in the eyes of American Jewish groups.

Boruch Gorin, a spokesman for the federation, called this criticism regrettable and inaccurate.



Canadian cops go to Israel

CANANDA (JTA) — Canadian police chiefs left for a visit to Israel.

More than 30 chiefs from Ontario will spend five days in Israel.

They are scheduled to learn about Israeli police procedures and anti-terrorism issues and meet with senior officials from the Israeli army and both the Israeli and Palestinian police.

Members of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police are joining officials from the Ontario region of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto on the mission, which is also slated to tour holy sites and strategic defense positions.

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Court seeks balance in Ten Commandments case

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish scholars say there are some circumstances in which they would find the public display of the Ten Commandments on government property acceptable — but not the cases now before the Supreme Court.

In oral arguments on two separate Ten Commandments cases Wednesday, the justices seemed to be looking for the line that divided acceptable acknowledgment of the role religion played in the founding of American law and government, and an outright endorsement of religion.

Jews seem to be grappling with the same question.

Many Jewish groups are by and large opposed to the public display of the Ten Commandments, viewing it as an endorsement of Judeo-Christian values, and in some cases, pushing a Protestant message over Jewish and Catholic interpretations of the Ten Commandments.

A coalition of Orthodox groups has taken an opposing tack, saying that religious symbols also can have secular meaning and that the Ten Commandments' role in modern legal codes should be acknowledged.

The court's decision, expected in June, could have a great impact on the growing debate about the role of religion in government and society.

Approval of such displays could lead to their proliferation, while rejection could spark a backlash.

But even opponents say public displays that framed the Ten Commandments in a historic context without express endorsement of religion would be acceptable.

"There is a general consensus that if the posting of the Ten Commandments is part of a historical display, it would be permitted," Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, said outside the courthouse.

Some Jewish observers suggested that a ruling allowing historical displays could pave the way for those with more covert religious motives.

"If the court attempts to draw some lines, there are going to be those who take the ruling in good faith and those who take it in bad faith," said Jeffrey Sinensky, general counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

As they heard the two cases on Wednesday — one about a monument near the Texas State Capitol and the other about a display

of historical documents hung in front of courthouses in two Kentucky counties — the justices seemed to be trying to find an acceptable use of the Ten Commandments on government property.

But acting U.S. Solicitor General Paul Clement, who spoke in both cases on behalf of the Bush administration, which is backing both displays, said, "The idea of having a fence around the Ten Commandments to make clear the state has nothing to do with it, I think that is bending it too far."

In her questioning, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wondered whether a display would be beyond reproach in a museum-like setting. She also wondered how displaying the Decalogue is any different from starting court or legislative sessions with a prayer.

Justice Stephen Breyer had the same question. "I'm really looking for a key of what's too far and what's not," he said.

Some Jewish court watchers said they are concerned about the possibility that a line will be drawn, because, they say, there is little way to present the Ten Commandments without it offending people outside the Judeo-Christian religions, and more people will be offended when Protestant or other interpretive text is added.

Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League, said if the court rules that all displays of the Ten Commandments on government property are unconstitutional, some grass-roots forces likely would launch an effort to amend the Constitution that would permit them.

And if the court draws a line for the acceptable use of the Ten Commandments, individual displays would be questioned for context.

"There's the possibility that this issue would move from a legal issue to a packaging issue, and how a particular display is packaged," he said.

During the oral arguments Wednesday, some justices questioned whether it would make a difference if there were no text but just the symbol of two tablets, perhaps with numerals symbolizing the commandments.

The Ten Commandments are shown on the wall of the Supreme Court, with Moses

holding two tablets containing Hebrew text.

The justices all seemed to agree that the courtroom display was constitutional, because Moses was shown alongside other historical figures, and, they said, it is a tribute to the origins of American law.

In the Kentucky case, *McCreary County v. ACLU*, the state of Kentucky said it, too, was placing the Ten Commandments alongside other historical documents,

such as the Declaration of Independence. But justices seemed concerned that the display had been changed three times in a year, each time becoming less overtly religious.

In the Texas case, *Van Orden v. Perry*, proponents argued that the monument had a secular purpose of honoring the Fraternal Order of Eagles, which presented the display to the state legislature in 1961. But opponents argue it is sending a profoundly religious message.

"When you put sacred text somewhere on government property, it is the government endorsement," said attorney Erwin Chemerinsky, who was arguing the case on behalf of plaintiff Thomas Van Orden, who was protesting the Texas display.

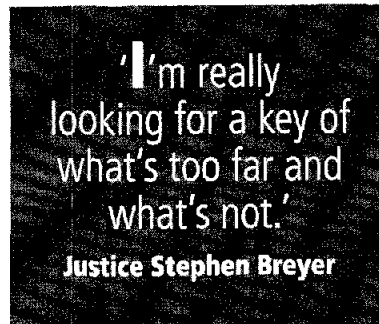
"Government cannot endorse religion in a way that makes some people feel like insiders and some people feel like outsiders," he said.

It was noted that Texas' display could make Jews feel like outsiders because the text does not follow the Jewish form of the Ten Commandments.

But Justice Anthony Kennedy suggested those who oppose the Decalogue display could just avert their eyes, and that minority religions must have some tolerance for the majority's viewpoint.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg seemed to try to find a line between the display of the Ten Commandments and acts of ceremonial deism — allowing the words "In God We Trust" on currency or "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Most Jewish groups do not oppose those uses.

"It's not about a brief reference," Ginsburg, who is Jewish, said of the Ten Commandments displays. "It is a powerful statement of the covenant the Lord is making with his people." ■



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Columbia report delayed

A Columbia University committee investigating charges of faculty intimidation toward pro-Israel students has postponed its report.

In a letter sent Monday to Columbia President Lee Bollinger, the chair of the grievance committee said it had not yet concluded its work.

The controversy surrounding charges of intimidation among anti-Israel faculty in the university's Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures department has roiled the campus and captured national attention.

"To date, we have met with more than 50 students, faculty and administrators. These have been productive sessions, and it is hard even in retrospect to see which we might have skipped in the interest of expeditiousness," wrote Ira Katznelson.

The committee plans to conclude hearing complaints by next week and issue a public summary and report by March 25.

Judge rules against Nazi collaborator

A former Nazi concentration camp guard was stripped of his U.S. citizenship.

A U.S. judge has ruled that Iwan Mandycz served as an armed guard at the Poniatowa labor camp in Poland in 1943 and later served in Sachsenhausen in Germany.

Mandycz concealed his Nazi collaboration when he applied to immigrate to the United States in 1949.

The lawsuit against Mandycz was brought by the Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations. Mandycz can appeal the decision.

RJC condemns Byrd remarks

The Republican Jewish Coalition criticized remarks by a U.S. senator, who compared Republican political tactics to Adolf Hitler's.

Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) said Tuesday on the Senate floor that Republican efforts to forbid a filibuster on judicial nominations was like Hitler's efforts to gain support for Nazi policies in the German Reichstag.

"Hitler never abandoned the cloak of legality," Byrd said. "He recognized the enormous psychological value of having the law on his side. Instead, he turned the law inside out and made illegality legal."

The RJC called the remarks "inappropriate and reprehensible."

Byrd's office said in a statement that the senator was not comparing the Republican Party or any of its members to Hitler, but rather was quoting historian Alan Bullock, who wrote "Hitler: A Study in Tyranny."

JNF launches student petition

A new campaign urges the U.S. State Department to intervene to help boost college study programs in Israel.

Caravan for Democracy, a program of the Jewish National Fund, Media Watch International and Hamagshamim, launched the campaign with a news conference on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

The group is asking people to sign an online petition asking U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to reconsider the State Department travel warning to Israel and examine its effect on those who wish to study abroad.

Students are being urged to present the petitions to their campus administrations, many of which have canceled their Israel study programs in light of the travel warning, along with a letter asking them to resume and promote the programs.

Hillel visionary dies

David Bittker, a member of Hillel's International Board of Governors, died of pancreatic cancer at 73.

The Detroit philanthropist was a B'nai B'rith leader who helped Hillel gain independence from the fraternal group that ran it for 70 years, according to Hillel.

He was the first chairman of the board of directors of Hillel when it became independent.

MIDDLE EAST

Bomb lab busted

Israeli forces uncovered a secret munitions factory in the West Bank.

Acting on an intelligence tip, commandos raided a village near Jenin before dawn Wednesday and found the Hamas factory hidden under a picture-framing store.

Materials for building bombs and Kassam rockets were found at the scene, Israeli security sources said.

Right to fight

Settlers have the right to speak out against the Gaza withdrawal plan, an Israeli watchdog group said.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel came out in defense of the political right wing Wednesday after Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said she sought to toughen anti-incitement laws.

"The minority has a right to raise its voice as a last resort, in hope of prevailing upon the majority to reconsider its decisions," the association said in an open letter to Livni. "We fear that, as events unfold, there will be a restriction of the rights of those who oppose 'disengagement' and want to hold protests and demonstrations within legal boundaries."

Terror accomplice jailed

An Israeli Arab received a 42-year prison sentence for complicity in Palestinian terrorism.

The Nazareth District Court jailed Muafek Iruk, a 60-year-old Galilee man, Wednesday for driving two Palestinian suicide bombers to downtown Tel Aviv in January 2003, where they killed 23 people.

Slow going for Gaza plan

Sixty-three settler families have agreed to leave the Gaza Strip, an Israeli official said.

According to figures released Wednesday by Disengagement Authority chief Yonatan Bassi, 63 families from the mostly secular settlements of Peat Sadeh, Nisanit and Elei Sinai have taken up government relocation packages before this summer's Gaza withdrawal.

Though this represents a minority of some 1,700 families slated for evacuation, Bassi has said that he expects most of the settlers to go quietly as the deadline approaches.

WORLD

Eichmann kidnapper dies

Peter Zvi Malkin, a Mossad agent who helped bring Adolf Eichmann to trial in Israel, has died.

Malkin died Tuesday at 77 in New York. His body is being flown to Israel for burial by the Israeli government, according to Arye Mekel, consul general of Israel in New York.

Malkin helped kidnap the Nazi war criminal in Argentina by punching him and shoving him into a car and guarding him in a Buenos Aires apartment until he was flown to Israel for trial.

A memorial service was being held for Malkin at the Park East Synagogue in New York on Wednesday night.