

IN THE NEWS

Likud opposes early primary vote

Israel's Likud Party gave Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a narrow victory by voting to oppose early party primaries.

The motion to bring the party primary forward to Nov. 2, proposed by Sharon's main rival, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was defeated Monday in the party's Central Committee.

More than 90 percent of the 3,000-person committee voted.

Israeli slain in West Bank

Palestinian terrorists are suspected of kidnapping and killing an Israeli in the West Bank.

The body of a Jerusalem man who went missing last week was discovered Monday outside the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Israeli police said the murder was the work of a Hamas cell, and that a suspect had been taken into custody.

The Islamic terrorist group had no immediate comment.

Hurricane Rita hits Baton Rouge shul

Torah scrolls that had been evacuated from New Orleans to Baton Rouge because of Hurricane Katrina were again moved to keep them safe after Rita.

"They had to re-rescue the Torahs that had already been rescued once," Emily Grotta, a spokeswoman for the Union for Reform Judaism, said of the scrolls that were being kept at Beth Shalom Synagogue.

The synagogue's ceiling was badly damaged, leading to flooding in the sanctuary and the social hall, but the Torahs were unharmed. Congregation Gates of Prayer in Metairie, La., had its sanctuary flooded in Katrina.

Other synagogues in the area were operating out of parking lots, other temples and even a neighboring church.

WORLD REPORT

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Israelis sneak into New Orleans to help those in post-Katrina chaos

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Washington may have rebuffed Israeli offers of expert assistance in the days after Hurricane Katrina, but a team of Israeli rescue personnel managed to deploy in some of the worst-hit areas around New Orleans, JTA has learned.

The 18-member team — which included physicians, mental health professionals, trauma specialists, logistics experts and a special unit of Israeli police divers — arrived in St. Bernard Parish and Plaquemines Parish on Sept. 10 and spent a week and a half assisting fire department search-and-rescue squads and sitting in on daily planning meetings that included local leadership and a complement of FEMA, police, military and fire representatives, the Israeli team's leader said.

The team administered first aid to survivors, rescued abandoned pets and discovered victims of the storm, which ravaged the Gulf Coast.

Carting equipment ranging from axes and ropes to electrical generators, satellite phones and three weeks' worth of food, the group arrived in the United States in civilian garb, waiting until they hit the decimated areas to don T-shirts featuring the group's logo and other identifying garb that would mark them as uninvited rescue personnel.

"We had tools like Jack the Ripper," said Gal Lusky, a diver who founded Israeli Flying Aid, a non-governmental organization that undertook the mission along with the IsraAID relief group. "We had plenty of stuff and we had to justify it at immigration. When we were asked what is all that equipment, we said we were going to the Jewish community to teach youth groups how to prepare summer camps."

Asked about the Israeli personnel aid, a spokesman for FEMA said only that "there were many volunteer groups from different countries who came to Louisiana to help the people and the state."

"FEMA wants to thank them for the assistance and the hard work they did," he said.

Rep. Charles Melancon (D-La.) said the Israelis "performed courageously in south Louisiana when we needed them most."

"I'm personally very grateful for their efforts and I know that those they touched will always remember the generosity of the Israeli people, who sent help from so far away," he said in an e-mail to JTA.

Before entering the affected areas, the team had to work around Louisiana medical accreditation policies that, like those in other states, require that physicians be recognized by the state in question in order to practice. The Israeli doctors were not accredited in Louisiana and could not provide medical services without this stamp of approval.

Perry Witkin, president of the Minnesota-based relief organization Nechama, was in contact with the medical director of Louisiana's Public Health Department, and together they were able to come up with a formula for the Israelis' participation.

The team would be allowed in but the doctors would not be "practicing medicine, but would be there as physicians to help the Israelis should something happen to them," said Witkin, who was on the ground along with a team from the American Refugee Committee, the Mayo Clinic, the University of Minnesota and The College of St. Catherine's.

In addition, he said, they could "use their

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HEADLINES

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skills in search/rescue and recovery and their emergency response skills as first-aid responders.”

Once that was hammered out, the Israeli team received a two-ambulance escort onto a ferry and from there headed into the outlying parishes, where they were received with slightly puzzled appreciation.

“The soldiers were shocked seeing us,” Lusky said. They asked the Israelis, “How come you came from so far? You have your own troubles. You’re such a small country.

“The answer,” Lusky continued, “is that we’re a small country but big friends. For us it was so obvious. America has been such a good friend for ages.”

Several days into the ordeal, the Israelis were working with a fire department team when they learned that one of the firefighters, a man named Ervin, had lived in a house on the street they were clearing. They had checked Ervin’s house the previous day, it turned out, but he hadn’t had the heart to go in and survey the damage.

“So I took him hand in hand to his house,” said Sarit Vino Elad, a singer-actress who works in psychodrama. “It was another ruined, muddy, ugly house — but for him it was home. He was looking at his house, at his wife’s china collection, at his dining room. His cat was dead on the couch in the living room.”

The place was badly damaged but Ervin was pleased to find that his bed, which his wife had made before evacuating, was still made, and her silk pajamas were lying neatly on the comforter.

The group received funding from the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and the Philadelphia-based investment firm CMS Companies, which first came in contact with IsraAID when it was organizing an effort to raise money for relief after last winter’s Southeast Asian tsunami.

The team received additional logistical support — cars, housing, contact with local officials — from federations in Houston, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, in addition to the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. ■

AIPAC plans to focus on wider range

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The American Israel Public Affairs Committee is undergoing major restructuring in the wake of recent growth, JTA has learned.

The premier pro-Israel lobby is simultaneously expanding its lobbying efforts in Washington, the number of issues it addresses and its outreach to Jewish communities across the United States, according to three sources familiar with the expansion.

The changes have been in the works since 2003, all the sources said, and predate an FBI raid last year that led to charges against two former AIPAC staffers accused of passing classified information.

Much of AIPAC’s growth has to do with renewed activist interest in Israel since the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, according to insiders. The momentum accelerated with the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

AIPAC has expanded its top management team, hired a number of new regional directors and added lobbyists. No one would give specific numbers.

The expansion is of a piece with the organization’s recent membership drives through synagogues and on college campuses. AIPAC officials say the average regional event has ballooned from 200-300 people a few years ago to about 1,000 nowadays.

AIPAC also has added a number of issues to its lobbying agenda, including homeland security, nuclear proliferation and terrorism. Its venture into homeland security is a first dip into domestic issues for the organization.

“Given AIPAC’s tremendous growth, both in terms of its membership and overall agenda, we continue to evolve and explore ways we can be even more effective and achieve greater synergy across all areas

of the organization,” spokesman Josh Block said.

AIPAC’s membership has almost doubled since 2000, from 55,000 to 100,000, and its annual operating budget has more than doubled, from \$17 million to more than \$40 million.

It also has established a capital fund and a building fund. By the end of 2007 AIPAC will be housed in its own building

for the first time, a few blocks from the Capitol.

A hallmark of the restructuring is that the congressional and executive branch lobbying departments, run separately for years, will be rolled into one outfit. It will be jointly headed by Brad Gordon,

who currently runs congressional lobbying, and Marvin Feuer, a senior defense analyst.

Much of the criticism of AIPAC in the wake of the FBI case is that one of the targeted former staffers — Steve Rosen, who was director of foreign policy issues — relied too heavily on the executive branch and allegedly became embroiled in its secrets. Feuer has assumed Rosen’s responsibilities.

All three sources said the plan to combine the two lobbying departments predated the FBI raid. Two of the sources said the circumstances of Rosen’s departure helped shape how the new shop would operate, though they would not elaborate.

AIPAC fired Rosen in April in the wake of the FBI investigation, which AIPAC said uncovered evidence of inappropriate behavior.

Earlier this summer, AIPAC confirmed that it had hired former Justice Department lawyers working for an outside legal firm, Howrey LLP, to review its lobbying practices.

However, the FBI raid and the legal charges against Rosen and Keith Weissman, an Iran analyst, have resulted in increased contributions for the organization, AIPAC lay leaders have said. ■

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JTA WORLD REPORT

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Paris synagogue opens its doors to all

By LAUREN ELKIN

PARIS (JTA) — Where in the world can you find a synagogue whose members are not necessarily Jewish; that holds services in English, French, and Hebrew; where Americans bless the State of France and where ruach, or spirit, knows no linguistic boundaries?

At Kehilat Geshet, which since 1993 has been an oasis for English-speaking Jews in Paris. An egalitarian synagogue with a name taken from the Hebrew words for “community” and “bridge,” Kehilat Geshet prides itself on “bridging the gap” between cultures — French and Anglophone, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, modern and traditional. One might add “visitor and native” to the list as well, as Kehilat Geshet welcomes Jewish tourists passing through Paris to celebrate Shabbat as if they were at home.

Kehilat Geshet began in 1992, when several Jewish families who had been meeting in apartments to observe Shabbat and other holidays decided that Paris, which has a church that is a major fixture in American expatriate life, should also have a place for American and Anglophone Jews to congregate.

“We started out with mainly mixed marriages,” explains the founding rabbi, Tom Cohen, or “Reb Tom” as he is known in the community. “Jewish-American women married to non-Jewish Frenchmen, who were having children and wanted to bring Judaism into their family life.”

Nowadays the congregation consists of more than 140 families of all types — Anglophone, French and an increasingly international membership. “It’s even become, to a certain extent, the corner synagogue,” Cohen said. “It’s just the closest one in the neighborhood.” Originally founded in the Paris suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the congregation expanded to the city’s Seventeenth District two years ago.

Betsy Matheny, one of the founding members of the congregation, explains, “We were split geographically from the start.” She says she was part of a group that had children in an English-language Talmud Torah class in Paris but “we all lived in the suburbs and wanted to create something closer to home, so we didn’t have to shlep to Paris all the time. But then we realized there were a lot of English-speaking Jews in Paris who didn’t want to

shlep to the suburbs, so we realized we had to do something for them, too.”

Kehilat Geshet seeks to appeal to French Jews as well — both those who have spent time in the United States and those who are contemplating alternate ways of being Jewish. Bernard Hass, the president of the synagogue, who was raised and celebrated his bar mitzvah in Orthodox-dominated France, says that his marriage to an American Jew, Shirley Fishbein-Hass, opened his

eyes to other ways of being Jewish.

The congregation is so inclusive that some members “aren’t even Jewish,” Matheny says. “When we founded Kehilat

Geshet, we obviously got to write our own statutes — so we said that non-Jews could be members.”

This is a positive change from the synagogues that some families left behind in the United States, explains board member Fishbein-Hass. “If the wife is Jewish and the husband isn’t, you end up with the husband being excluded from membership. Here, the entire family can join.”

Cohen relates an anecdote regarding a bar mitzvah he performed in which the young man was the only Jew in the family — the mother was from a mixed marriage, and the father was French and not Jewish. “All three were converting, but the bar mitzvah boy was the only officially Jewish one by the time the day came around.”

Originally from Portland, Ore., the rabbi met his wife, a French rabbi with her own congregation in Paris, while at yeshiva in Israel.

A Conservative-trained rabbi who studied at the University of Judaism and was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, the flagship institution of the Conservative movement, Cohen sees his role as that of a facilitator — ensuring that his congregation is making choices from an informed place. “I’m not a flag planter,” he says. “I want the community to be open to Reform and Conservative Jews. We’re transdenominational. We want to create a community where people

from different perspectives can feel at home and learn from each other.”

It’s a goal that appeals to many expatriate Jews in Paris, who can feel triply marginalized — as Americans in France, as Jews in a Catholic country, and as Ashkenazim in a country where the majority of Jews are Sephardim. “And it allows children of interfaith marriages to develop a sense of their Jewish identity,” Matheny adds.

Having Jews from so many backgrounds forces the synagogue to

address a variety of expectations.

“There are certain things we won’t compromise on,” Fishbein-Hass says. “Egalitarianism, for one. But other than that, we’re open to discussion. Tom has integrated certain Sephardi melodies into services, for instance.”

On the High Holidays, Cohen says, “It’s interesting to see which parts of the service really get which parts of the congregation going.” Kol Nidre, he says, is the pinnacle of the Yom Kippur service for the Ashkenazim — “It’s all about Ashkenazi guilt and neurosis. One last prayer before God closes the gate!” — while the Sephardim love Ne’ilah “because then they can now go out and party and celebrate the joy of Judaism.”

Because the liberal movement of Judaism is not recognized by the Consistoire, the umbrella organization of religious Jewish groups in France, Kehilat Geshet, along with other liberal synagogues in France, does not receive government funds to operate, as Orthodox synagogues do. Kehilat Geshet has established an organization to encourage donations from American Jews. KG USA also coordinates exchange programs with American synagogues.

The sense of community is particularly important to the youth-group sector of the synagogue — the post-b’nai/b’not mitzvahs, who are a tight group, the rabbi says, explaining that they suffer the most from the “Franco-American Jew in France” identity crisis. “Wherever they go in the world, we want them to feel comfortable walking into a shul.”

And they’ll be able to daven, or pray, in at least three languages. ■

The congregation is so inclusive that some members ‘aren’t even Jewish.’

Betsy Matheny

Founding member, Kehilat Geshet

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. to Israel: Be careful in Gaza

Israel should consider the consequences of its actions in the Gaza Strip, the State Department spokesman said.

Israeli jets retaliated against Palestinian targets in Gaza over the weekend after Hamas terrorists launched rockets into Israel barely two weeks after Israel ended its 38-year occupation of Gaza.

"The Palestinian Authority has the responsibility — they have taken actions to try to prevent such future attacks," Sean McCormack said Monday.

"It is important that they take up their obligations to stop terror attacks, to dismantle terrorist organizations. We also understand Israel's right to defend itself, but in taking actions to defend itself, we ask Israel to consider the effect that its actions may have on reaching the overall goal that all share of achieving two states living side by side in peace and security," McCormack said.

Reform calls for jobs equity after Katrina

The Reform movement joined an interfaith call for equitable distribution of jobs in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism joined Christian, Muslim and Buddhist groups last week in calling for the establishment of a commission that would include religious leaders and that would ensure that those displaced in the hurricane season are given priority in getting jobs created by the reconstruction.

Telethon raises money for Katrina victims

Hurricane Katrina was the big draw at the 25th annual Chabad telethon, which raised \$6.2 million for Chabad West Coast institutions.

Celebrity guests and Chabad rabbis from the Gulf Coast implored donors during Sunday's eight-hour live broadcast to add to their pledges to help hurricane victims through Chabad's emergency relief program.

The telethon has raised millions of dollars every year for Chabad activities on the West Coast, where Chabad has more than 200 institutions.

Waskow arrested outside White House

Police outside the White House detained a rabbi protesting the Iraq war.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center in Philadelphia joined dozens of other protesters who sat down Monday on the sidewalk in front of the White House and refused police entreaties to move.

Wearing a bright blue tallit, Waskow was handcuffed and put on a bus with other protesters.

New Orleans out as Maccabi host

New Orleans no longer will be a host of next year's JCC Maccabi Games.

New Orleans was to be the kickoff site of the four-city games next summer until Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city, the Atlanta Jewish Times reported.

The other host cities are Phoenix; Stamford, Conn.; and Vancouver; New Orleans has yet to be replaced.

Student kicked off newspaper

A Jewish student at the University of North Carolina was kicked off the student newspaper after she wrote an article defending racial profiling.

Jillian Bandes, 20, was kicked off the Daily Tar Heel after she wrote in a column that she wanted all Arabs to be "stripped naked and cavity-searched if they got within 100 yards of an airport," the Forward reported.

The paper's editor originally defended the column, but later fired her, saying she had misrepresented the views of three Arab Americans whom she quoted as agreeing with her.

Bandes, the daughter of a Jewish man and Catholic woman who grew up attending a Reform temple, said that if she had to do it over again she would state her argument differently.

MIDDLE EAST

U.S. Jew arrested for alleged Sharon plot

An American Jew was arrested in Israel on suspicion that he planned to assassinate Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Police said they planned to deport Shen'or Zalman Hatzkolevitch, a fervently Orthodox Jewish man from Brooklyn.

It would mark the first time a Jew is deported from Israel for security violations.

Iran one step closer to sanctions

The United Nations' nuclear watchdog is one step closer to referring Iran to the U.N. Security Council for sanctions.

A resolution passed Saturday by the International Atomic Energy Agency board requires Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, end construction of a heavy-water treatment plant and allow increased inspection of its nuclear facilities.

Israel and the United States, believing Iran may be less than two years away from manufacturing a nuclear bomb, had been pressing the IAEA to pass such a resolution.

Iran may face sanctions as early as November when the IAEA board next meets.

Joint peace rallies held

Thousands of Israelis and Palestinians held rallies calling for a return to peace talks and an end to violence.

In an address first delivered Saturday in Ramallah and then broadcast in Jerusalem, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas extended greetings to the Israeli peace camp, saying that the crowds at both rallies were fighting for the same goal of peace and an end to suffering.

Some 10,000 people attended the Ramallah rally and 7,000 assembled in Jerusalem.

From Hurricane to Haifa

A student evacuated from New Orleans enrolled at an Israeli university.

Sasha Solomon, 19, who left Loyola University before Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, registered with the foreign-learning program at the University of Haifa.

Solomon is believed to be the first to take up a Jewish Agency for Israel offer to relocate students from New Orleans to Israel.

WORLD

E.C. slams media for being naive

A European Commission report on terrorist recruitment singles out the media for naively portraying terrorists as oppressed.

"Some media disseminate propaganda which contributes to violent radicalization," said a report published last week by E.C. Vice President Franco Frattini, entitled "Terrorist Recruitment: Addressing the Factors Contributing to Violent Radicalization."

"Typically this conveys a reductionist and conspiratorial worldview where inequity and oppression are dominant," the report said.

Frattini cited Al-Manar, a television station affiliated with the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah, as encouraging terrorism.