


IN THE NEWS
Roberts becomes U.S. chief justice

The Senate approved John Roberts as the new U.S. chief justice, with support from some Jewish senators.

Roberts, 51, was approved 78-22 on Thursday.

Jewish senators voted 7-4 on the confirmation: Sens. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), Russell Feingold (D-Wisc.), Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.) voted yes, while Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) voted no.

Guilty plea in AIPAC case

A Pentagon analyst at the center of an investigation that has rocked the American Israel Public Affairs Committee will plead guilty.

Edward Adams, a spokesman for the U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., announced Thursday that Lawrence Franklin had scheduled a guilty plea for Oct. 5.

Edwards said he did not know what charge Franklin would plead to.

Lawyers for Franklin in the past have suggested that he would plead guilty to charges that he moved classified documents out of a designated area to his home in West Virginia, the least of the charges against Franklin.

Israel kills West Bank terrorists

Israeli troops killed three Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank.

Soldiers shot dead the Al-Aksa Brigade commander in Jenin, as well as two Islamic Jihad fugitives in a nearby village, during a pre-dawn raid on the city Thursday.

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Due to Rosh Hashanah, the JTA World Report will not be published on Wednesday, Oct. 5, and Thursday, Oct. 6.

WORLD REPORT

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Rabbis for Human Rights

Members of Rabbis for Human Rights meet with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to present a letter protesting the use of torture of detainees, September 2005 in Washington.

Some Jews join anti-war protests, but worry about radical bedfellows

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Hours before a demonstration against the Iraq war swelled to tens of thousands of people, a few dozen protesters packed a stately synagogue in downtown Washington and considered Egypt.

Not the current regime of Hosni Mubarak, but the plight of the Hebrews under pharaoh millennia ago — “caught between a rock and a hard place,” as Rabbi Arthur Waskow told the congregants at the Shabbat service last weekend.

The rock the Jewish protesters faced was their impassioned opposition to the Iraq war, while the hard place was the vituperative

anti-Israeli sentiment among some of their anti-war allies.

Between sermons, worshippers discussed which events to attend that weekend and which to avoid because of the likely presence of virulent anti-Zionism.

The service, a joyful melding of psalms and protest songs, offered Jewish protesters a way through, Waskow said afterward.

“We figured out a way to honor Shabbat and to celebrate the Jewish values of Israel and the Jewish values of ‘seek peace and pursue it,’” said Waskow, who heads Philadelphia’s Shalom Center.

It’s a dilemma that the national Jewish

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ Jews join anti-war protests, but worry about anti-Israel ideology

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leadership may soon face as support for the war falls. In surveys last year, U.S. Jews opposed the war in even greater numbers than non-Jews, while recent surveys show that a majority of Americans oppose how the Bush administration is handling the situation.

Jewish officials say privately that they're seeking an outlet for burgeoning anti-war sentiment at the grass-roots level, but the problem is that some of the war's leading opponents — such as Cindy Sheehan, a mother whose son died in the war — equate the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq with Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

Some of the best-organized groups — and those likeliest to attend anti-war protests — do not stop at criticizing Israeli policy but reject Israel's very existence. International ANSWER, a cosponsor of several of the weekend events, speaks of Israel as “within the borders of historic Palestine.”

Jewish protesters spoke of their discomfort at sharing space with placards accusing Israel of being the dog that wags the American tail.

Waskow avoided events associated with ANSWER Rabbi Michael Lerner, of the San Francisco-based Tikkun community, joined those events, but told followers that he wished organizers had heeded his calls to distance the rally from ANSWER.

That company has kept many of the top Jewish groups silent since the war began in March 2003. Prior to the war, the Reform,

Conservative and Orthodox streams each issued statements supporting its objectives — the removal of Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction — but stopping short of endorsing the war outright.

More than two years later, that equivocation continues. Spokesmen for the Reform and Orthodox movements did not return calls in time for this story, but a Conservative movement official said there was little demand for an organizational position.

“We haven't had any discussions recently as an organization,” said Mark Waldman, director of public policy for United Synagogue.

Jewish defense organizations and pro-Israel groups by and large also expressed support for Bush administration objectives at the war's outset, but stopped short of explicitly endorsing the war.

Recently there have been signs of a shift toward criticism. The Reform movement and the Anti-Defamation League noted with alarm revelations last year that captives in U.S. custody had been tortured.

Those images prompted Rabbis for Human Rights-North America to launch a rabbinic letter in January, citing Jewish teachings, to call on President Bush and Congress to end torture, inhumane treatment and degradation of captives. Administration officials say some of the conventions against torture do not apply to captives suspected of terrorism because they are not traditional soldiers in uniform.

“We understand that the most fundamental ethical principle, which results from our belief in God as Creator of the world and Parent of all humanity, is that every human being is seen as reflecting the Image of God,” says the letter, which so far has accrued 600 signatories from all Jewish streams. “Torture shatters and defiles God's image.”

The group is not contemplating a broader encomium against the war in Iraq, said its executive director, Rabbi Brian Walt, because its mandate is strictly human rights and not broader political issues. But the groundswell of support for the petition suggests a desire for a more

substantive statement from the Jewish community, he said.

“Torture is such a challenging topic, no one wants to think about it,” Walt said. “Most Americans do not believe Americans would do such a thing, but the reality is that we are.”

The group was counseling rabbis to address the topic in High Holiday sermons.

Whether a major group moves beyond the specific issue of torture to a broader

indictment of the war remains an open question. United for Peace and Justice, the umbrella body that organized the weekend's events, hopes to nudge the anti-war movement to a middle ground that would make mainstream Jewish groups and others more comfortable with its message, spokesman Bill Dobbs said.

“We planned three days of events: a rally, a march, a concert with speakers, a peace and justice festival, an interfaith service, civil disobedience, a large lobbying effort,” he told JTA. “Of all of those events, two of them” — the march and the concert — “were cosponsored by ANSWER.”

Dobbs suggested the movement could move further toward accommodating those uncomfortable with the radicals' message.

One problem, he said, is reconciling groups like his that advocate an immediate withdrawal from Iraq with those who advocate a managed exit strategy.

Waskow, who was arrested Monday in front of the White House with another 270 protesters, said the weekend's events were successful and offered an outlet for young Jews who oppose the war but hear little about it from their community's leaders.

“We were able to bring a positive Jewish message and to be able to affirm clearly that our Jewish values include an affirmation of the State of Israel,” he said. “I'm deeply disappointed at the silence of the larger Jewish organizations about the war. They've wasted a hunk of next generations of Jews, and wasted a connection with decent parts of the anti-war movement.”

I'm deeply disappointed at the silence of the larger Jewish organizations about the war.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Shalom Center

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Annual U.S. aid to Israel weathers storm

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Annual U.S. aid to Israel appears unlikely to fall despite the costs associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but an extra aid package to smooth Israel's Gaza Strip withdrawal is off the table for now.

Officials have said Israel pulled its additional request for as much as \$2.2 billion in post-Gaza aid because it would seem inappropriate while the United States incurs huge expenses — as much as \$200 billion — in the wake of the two major storms.

"With one disaster after another, the momentum we had before the disengagement has been lost," Yossi Bachar, director general of Israel's Finance Ministry, said Sunday in Washington, where he was attending International Monetary Fund meetings.

But the request for extra post-Gaza assistance may come up again as soon as six months from now, a senior Israeli government source told JTA.

Israel wants \$600 million to relocate military bases removed from the Gaza Strip and up to \$1.6 billion to help absorb 9,000 settlers evacuated from Gaza and four settlements in the northern West Bank.

The money would not directly assist the settlers, but would fund infrastructure development and new industrial zones in the regions likeliest to absorb them, the Negev Desert in the south and the Galilee in the north. In an April meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, President Bush said he would consider any request Israel made.

Instead of pressing the case, however, Bachar said Israel was leaving it alone for now.

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An Israeli official with connections at the highest echelons of Israeli politics said a decision could come as soon as six months from now. In the meantime, Israel is going ahead with the proposed projects, the official said.

Sharon faced down an internal Likud Party challenge from withdrawal opponents this week, but could face another one in April, when the Likud holds its leadership primary. He faces national elections by the end of 2006.

Being able to show that the post-with-

drawal process is going smoothly would be a boon to him.

Officials in Israel and the United States say Israel faces no serious threat to the more than \$2.5 billion it routinely receives each year in military and economic assistance.

Similarly, the \$250 million still in the pipeline for the Palestinians remains untouched. The United States transferred the first \$50 million of \$300 million it has pledged to the Palestinians in late August, to facilitate self-rule in Gaza.

Congressional Republicans are considering "offsets" to help pay for Katrina — that is, reductions in sums already appropriated. In one proposal for offsets, Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) targets a number of foreign-aid projects, but leaves Israel and the Palestinians off his target list.

Pence, who heads the Republican Study Committee, an 86-member group of conservative Republicans, is known as a close friend of Israel in the U.S. House of Representatives, so it's no surprise that aid to Israel doesn't make his list.

Pence targets Egypt for an aid reduction because of its slowness in introducing democratic reform, and proposes freezing funding for Africa, AIDS relief and the Peace Corps, low-priority issues for Republicans.

More surprising is Pence's omission of assistance to the Palestinians, which has come under close congressional review because of concerns that money earmarked for the Palestinians has been squandered in the past by a corrupt regime closely associated with terrorists.

■
The Bush administration has argued that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is committed to reform and deserves greater consideration than his late predecessor, Yasser Arafat. It's a message that has resonated in Congress, especially ahead of legislative elections that could exponentially increase the political power of Hamas.

Aid to the Palestinians is considered too important to cut, a source close to a

leading congressional appropriator said.

That doesn't mean Palestinians should expect less scrutiny, however: Members of Congress had tough questions last week for the Bush administration's two top envoys to the Middle East at a House International Relations Committee hearing.

David Welch of the State Department and Gen. William Ward, the security envoy, acknowledged problems in the Palestinian Authority.

"Although President Mahmoud Abbas has taken some steps to as-

sert control, overall Palestinian Authority performance to date has been far from satisfactory," Welch said. "The P.A. must move quickly to establish order and to take steps to dismantle the infrastructure of terror."

The Palestinian Authority was unable to control the border with Egypt in the days after Israel withdrew, raising the specter of increased arms smuggling to terrorists. The border has quieted in recent days, but Hamas and other terrorist groups have begun launching rocket attacks on Israel, drawing a harsh Israeli response.

Congress has the power to slow the arrival of more funds by exercising its right to scrutiny, and members said they would closely watch the aftermath of Israel's withdrawal.

"In the midst of this chaos, the spotlight has now clearly shifted to the Palestinian Authority, which must now show that it can effectively and successfully govern Gaza," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chairwoman of the House's Middle East subcommittee.

Palestinians say they need money fast to assert control. Diana Buttu, an adviser to Abbas, said the Palestinian Authority is concerned that the international community has yet to provide some \$3 billion it pledged ahead of Israel's pullout. Much of that money is to go to construction projects that would create jobs.

"The international community has not followed through with its promises," she said Tuesday in a conference call organized by the Israel Policy Forum. "That will be something that Hamas pick up and run with." ■

**Aid for Israel's
Gaza withdrawal
is off the table
for now.**

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

AIPAC probe and election dominated headlines

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Looking back, it seems fitting that during the year in which Deep Throat was at last unmasked, events in the American Jewish world would unfold like a top-notch political thriller.

All the elements were there in 5765:

- A president who is heir to a powerful political dynasty ardently courted the Jewish vote as he sought a second term in the midst of a controversial war in the Mideast;

- America's top pro-Israel lobbying group was roiled by allegations of espionage by its officials;

- the U.S. Supreme Court's chief justice died and its first female justice resigned, spurring Jewish groups into action to help ensure that their concerns are taken into account in the selection of replacements;

- the leader of the free world, ready to spend the hard-earned political capital of his re-election, worked to spread democracy worldwide, guided by principles set forth in a new book by a former Soviet refusenik who now is a maverick hard-line politician in Israel.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Katrina devastated portions of the Gulf Coast, leaving hundreds dead and many thousands more homeless. Southern Jews were among those affected, with thousands evacuating their homes and heading for Houston; Birmingham, Ala.; Nashville; Atlanta; Austin, Texas; Dallas; cities in Florida; and elsewhere.

In some places, Jewish populations doubled and tripled almost overnight as evacuees poured in. Across the country, Jews stepped up to aid the victims, as day schools opened their doors to evacuees, families welcomed strangers into their homes, Jewish rescue squads searched through storm wreckage, and national and local Jewish organizations raised millions of dollars for those whose lives were turned topsy-turvy by the storm. Volunteers also rescued Torah scrolls from synagogues savaged by the hurricane.

Elsewhere, as Jews celebrated 350 years of Jewish life in America, the role of religion in the public sphere shifted to the forefront as several prominent cases sparked heated debate over the relationship of church and state.

5765: A YEAR OF POLITICS AND PROMISE

The theory of evolution's place in American classrooms again took center stage as lawsuits were filed in two cases where public schools elected to teach evolution as just one among several theories of human development — the most prominent alternative being intelligent design, which posits that the universe is so complex that its existence must be the product of some superin-

telligence.

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a split ruling over the propriety of the public display of the Ten Commandments. The bitterly divided court ruled that some such monuments are religious in their message and therefore are unconstitutional but others simply pay homage to the Decalogue as a formative element in American legal history and therefore are acceptable.

In a related story, scandal erupted after the release of a report on the religious climate at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, in which Jewish cadets said the school's overtly Christian atmosphere was incompatible with their religious needs.

The origins of the human race. The Ten Commandments. Religious freedom. All important issues to be sure.

Still, some Jewish minds spent the year focused on — well, on Jewish minds. Spurred by curiosity about Ashkenazi Jews' higher-than-average IQ scores and disproportionate representation among Nobel Prize winners in the sciences, a team of researchers in Utah released a study in June suggesting that because medieval Jews were restricted to jobs in finance, money lending and long-distance trade, their genetic codes over the course of generations selected genes for enhanced intellectual ability.

This intelligence boost, they hypothesized, could be linked to a series of potentially debilitating diseases to which Ashkenazi Jews are particularly susceptible, from Tay-Sachs to Gaucher's to Niemann-Pick.

The study, coming as the world marked 60 years since the Allied liberation of the

Nazi death camps, rang bells that some Jews — unnerved by the specter of eugenics — would rather not hear.

But the 60th anniversary of the Holocaust's end sounded bells at the United Nations that some Jews thought were long overdue: In January, the General Assembly held a session commemorating the camps' liberation. The gathering — which U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan lobbied for following a request from Israel — marked the first time that the world body had convened to commemorate the Holocaust and the first time that the General Assembly met at Israel's initiative.

"The tragedy of the Jewish people was unique," Annan said. "We must be on the watch for any revival of anti-Semitism and ready to act against the new forms of it that are happening today."

Meanwhile, the Jewish community responded strongly to a growing number of Protestant churches considering economic sanctions against Israel, with some Jewish groups even threatening a retreat

from interfaith dialogue.

Last summer, the Presbyterian Church USA passed a resolution considering "selective, phased divestment" from companies that do business with Israel. In November 2004, the board of the Episcopal Church voted to consider corporate actions against certain companies that do business with Israel. Episcopalians in New York and Massachusetts, though, opposed divestment measures.

In April, the board of the United Methodist Church voted to conduct a year-long study to consider divestment. In August, the Presbyterian Church said it had selected Caterpillar, Motorola, ITT Industries and United Technologies for possible divestment if the companies refuse to stop doing business with Israel. The Presbyterians also voted to pressure Citigroup because of its alleged connection to an Arab bank believed to have ties to suicide bombers.

Anti-Israel sentiment was also at the center of a scandal at Columbia University, as the release of "Columbia Unbecoming" — a film in which pro-Israel students allege



Menahem Kahana/AFP/Getty Images
Isaac Leider carries a Torah out of the flooded Beth Israel synagogue in New Orleans.

they were bullied because of their views by professors in the Mideast studies department — engendered heated campus debate about Israeli policy and academic freedom.

In late March a committee appointed by Columbia's president to investigate the charges finally issued its findings, citing just one incident where a faculty member "exceeded commonly accepted bounds." The group found no evidence of statements by faculty that "could reasonably be construed as anti-Semitic" — although, indeed, that had never been the charge.

Some Jewish students said the report was a whitewash aimed at protecting Columbia's reputation and vowed to fight on.

While Columbia students debated the findings, many more American Jews jumped into another debate: orange versus blue, withdrawal versus staying put in the Gaza Strip. The arguments were emotional and intense, but they didn't deter an estimated 3,200 North American Jews who were forecast to make aliyah by the end of 2005, which would mark the first time since 1983 that the annual figure tops 3,000.

But the year's most-watched stories on the American Jewish front came from the nation's capital.

As the 2004 presidential election approached, a contest some considered the most important in decades, Jewish voters got unprecedented attention from candidates hoping to garner support in several key battleground states. While domestic issues play a role

in how many Jews decide which candidate to vote for, the presidential hopefuls' pitches to Jews focused almost solely on Israel.

That approach initially was thought to favor President Bush, who is widely viewed among American Jews as a staunch ally of the Jewish state. But when it came to election night, Jewish voters pretty much kept their Democratic pedigree: Bush garnered about 24 percent of the Jewish vote, while about 76 percent went to Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.).

Having secured a second presidential term, Bush — in the midst of ongoing military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan — seized on a new book by former Israeli Cabinet minister and Soviet refusenik Natan Sharansky to support his own vision of reform in the Arab world, inviting Sharansky

to the White House and instructing White House staff to read Sharansky's book.

Sharansky's revived international prominence was reason for pride among many Jews, but the July 1 news that Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor would be stepping down was cause for some concern. Many observers, who had been girding for the expected retirement of ailing conservative Chief Justice William Rehnquist, were taken by surprise when O'Connor announced her retirement.

Concerned with issues of reproductive rights and church-state separation, some Jewish groups viewed O'Connor's forthcoming departure with trepidation and began working to ensure that the balance of the court — on which she served as a decisive swing vote on many issues — does not change with her exit.



Eric Draper/White House
President Bush shakes hands with future U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts.

changed the landscape of the court. Roberts' nomination was vaulted to the chief justice position, and Bush was expected to name a replacement for O'Connor later in the fall.

The next Supreme Court nomination could spark a more vigorous fight.

Moving from the Supreme Court to a lower court — and also to the court of public opinion — the prosecution of two former officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was further cause for agitation among U.S. Jews, raising many questions for the Jewish community about its work advocating for Israel and other policy issues.

Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman were fired from AIPAC in April, months after

stories broke that the pair allegedly received classified information from Larry Franklin, an Iran analyst at the Pentagon, and passed it along to officials at the Israeli Embassy in Washington and journalists. Franklin

pleaded not guilty in June to communicating classified information; Rosen and Weissman pleaded not guilty in August.

Rosen, the former longtime director of foreign policy issues for AIPAC, and Weissman, a former Iran specialist, are accused of receiving sensitive ma-

terial from three U.S. government officials — another reportedly was David Satterfield, at the time the State Department's deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, while the third has not been named — since 1999. They're accused of passing details to a political officer at the Israeli Embassy who recently returned to Israel and two other embassy officials who have not been identified.

The indictments may force Jewish groups and their peers to analyze the methods they use to receive information from government sources, as well as their information-sharing with Israeli counterparts.

AIPAC already has launched a campaign to re-brand itself, highlighting its American grass-roots ties instead of its cooperation with Israelis. The group also has hired outside lawyers to review its practices.

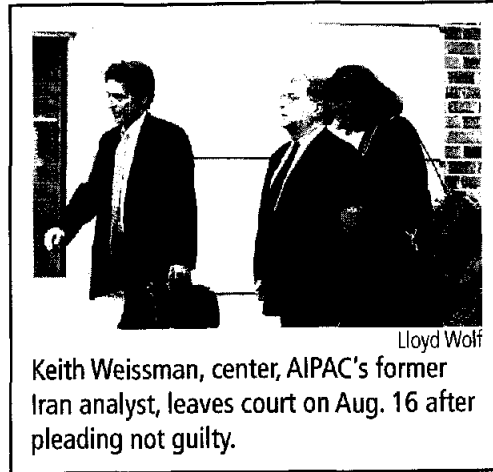
Another thing a lot of groups didn't have this year was kosher salami. As high political drama unfolded in American halls of power, kosher restaurants and food distributors across the country were suffering under the weight of a Hebrew National salami shortage, forcing some to fill the gap with other meat products.

The shortage, which also put the squeeze on luncheon meats such as turkey, hurt sales at U.S. eateries as customers blanched at the prospect of consuming what one kosher deli's counterman called "inferior product."

As the stuff of political intrigue, though, 5765 — luncheon meats aside — was anything but inferior product. It all goes to show, as the old saying goes, that politics are a lot like sausage: watching how either is made is no picnic.

Now, please pass the mustard. ■

(JTA Washington correspondent Matthew E. Berger contributed to this report)



Lloyd Wolf
Keith Weissman, center, AIPAC's former Iran analyst, leaves court on Aug. 16 after pleading not guilty.

Gulf Coast damage assessment slow

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — A month after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Jewish institutions in the region, from synagogues to schools to community centers, are still struggling to assess the nature of the damage to their buildings and the cost of repairing or rebuilding them.

"There's no way of knowing any costs at this point," said Arlene Barron, executive director of the New Orleans JCC. "It's very frustrating, it's very tough, because it's all moving so slowly. In New Orleans we haven't even been allowed back in yet, really."

Part of the problem, say Jewish community officials, is that insurance adjusters, who are overwhelmed dealing with numerous claims in the storm's aftermath, don't put institutions on their to-do lists until the areas where they are located are re-opened.

As such, some organizations are simply stuck waiting for adjusters to inspect their buildings. In the meantime, groups are taking small steps to help minimize the damage.

At the Chabad Jewish Center in Metairie, La., a clean-up crew went in last week and pulled out sheet rock and insulation to staunch the spread of mold in the synagogue building, which took in about two feet of water during Katrina.

The Goldring-Woldenberg Jewish Community Campus in Metairie, La., which houses the suburban branch of the JCC, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans and the New Orleans Jewish Day School, took about 8 inches of water on its first floor in Katrina.

Eric Stillman, the federation's executive director, said that following the storm, an insurance agent told Jewish officials that it would be all right for them to perform some immediate tasks to prevent the spread of mold: they restarted the building's air conditioning and sheet rock, and wall coverings were torn out on the first floor. In addition, furniture and some flooring materials were removed.

Meanwhile, synagogues throughout the area were busy trying to figure out not only how badly their facilities had been damaged, but where their congregants will be praying as the High Holidays approach.

Several Torah scrolls that had been hustled out of New Orleans for protection were evacuated for a second time in Rita's

aftermath when rain waters overwhelmed the roof drainage system at Beth Shalom, a Reform synagogue in Baton Rouge, La.

Although the Torahs were unharmed, the synagogue's ceiling was badly damaged, leading to flooding in both its sanctuary and social hall. The Jefferson Baptist Church, with which the synagogue shares a parking lot, recently opened its doors to allow the congregation to hold its services there.

Other Reform temples were hit as well. Congrega-

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

tion Gates of Prayer in Metairie had its sanctuary flooded in Katrina and continues to operate out of Temple Emanu-El in Houston, where many Jewish evacuees took refuge in the wake of Katrina.

Although New Orleans' Temple Sinai is itself in working order, so many of its congregants lost their homes that it will not be holding High Holiday services.

Its spiritual leader, Rabbi Edward Cohn, will instead be serving as interim rabbi over the holiday at Baton Rouge's B'nai Israel, which recently put its rabbi — who had spearheaded its effort to house dozens of hurricane evacuees — on administrative leave.

The Northshore Jewish Congregation Mandeville, La., has been holding services in a parking lot since the first storm, and is still hoping to be back in the building by Rosh Hashanah.

The historic Touro Synagogue, which bills itself as the oldest Jewish congregation outside of the original 13 colonies, sustained minimal damage, but the area where it is located remains closed and the synagogue continues to operate out of Congregation Beth Israel in Houston.

High Holiday services for evacuees looking for Reform worship are being planned in both Houston and Baton Rouge.

The Union for Reform Judaism, whose Disaster Relief Fund has raised close to \$2.5 million dollars, has now made \$765,000 in grants to disaster relief agencies, Jewish agencies and Reform synagogues.

Members of the Shir Chadash synagogue in Metairie, La., a Conservative congregation, are still waiting for a verdict from inspectors on whether their damaged shul can be repaired or will need to be rebuilt from scratch.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's Hurricane Relief Fund has thus far raised \$650,000.

At Beth Israel in Biloxi, Miss., also Conservative, large holes in the synagogue remain and its leaders also are not yet sure whether it can be fixed or will need to be torn down.

In the meantime, they are planning to sign a deal with a local hotel to secure a room for services.

Congregation Beth Israel in New Orleans, an Orthodox Union-affiliated shul, was flooded by somewhere between 8 to 18 feet of water. Four out of six of the synagogue's Torahs — among them scrolls believed to be more than 250 years old — were damaged beyond repair, but a Zaka Jewish rescue-and-recovery team was able to go in and salvage two Torahs.

"I'm glad that we did this, but I'm terribly saddened," said Isaac Leider of the New York-based Zaka team. "It's hard to see them in this condition."

The O.U., along with Yeshiva University and the Rabbinical Council of America, have thus far raised between \$420,000 and \$430,000 for hurricane relief.

The Chabad House at Tulane University stayed dry through the storms, but the Torah Academy in Metairie — whose preschool had just been remodeled — got between 6 inches and a foot of water. Damage to furniture and other items there was extensive.

Chabad-Lubavitch will be hosting a Rosh Hashanah retreat at the Atrium Hotel in Monroe, La. So far, 150 people have signed up for the High Holiday getaway, including a busload of evacuees coming in from Houston and Memphis.

Chabad — which has to date raised some \$1 million for hurricane relief — is also planning Yom Kippur services at the Chabad Jewish Center in Metairie.

The United Jewish Communities, meanwhile, enlisted the aid of Hollywood celebrities to raise money for its Disaster Relief Fund. The group — which along with the Jewish federations of North America, has raised more than \$16 million for disaster relief efforts — sponsored a benefit Tuesday in Los Angeles in which celebrities would be decorating tzedakah boxes that would then be auctioned on eBay.

"It's very frustrating, it's very tough, because it's all moving so slowly."

Arlene Barron
New Orleans JCC

ARTS & CULTURE

Kingsley rewrites Fagin character for new 'Oliver'

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Time-honored Jewish stereotypes and caricatures are falling on hard times in the movies.

Al Pacino's complex and heart-wrenching portrayal of Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice" put a human face on the vengeful money lender. In the German film "The Ninth Day," Judas is exalted for enabling Jesus to fulfill his divine mission.

Now Ben Kingsley, in a new movie version of Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist," endows Fagin, the trainer of young thieves, with some redeeming features.

The Fagin of the new movie is not identified or depicted as a Jew, a far cry from the "very old, shriveled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted hair," created by Dickens nearly 170 years ago.

Director Roman Polanski follows the original story, with some judicious editing.

Brought up in a hellish workhouse for the poor, orphan boy Oliver Twist escapes his indentured service with an undertaker and is recruited by the Artful Dodger into a ring of juvenile thieves, exploited and mothered by Fagin.

As Fagin, Kingsley's nose is elongated and his posture stooped, but he has shucked the preposterous proboscis sported by Alec Guinness in David Lean's 1948 version of the film, as well as Ron Moody's nasal inflection in the musical stage production of "Oliver."

Kingsley said he did not set out to counter previous Fagin stereotypes of unmitigated Jewish villainy, but rather used two thespian devices to get into the role.

One was to evoke the figure of a junk dealer Kingsley knew as a 9-year-old in Manchester, who "had teeth like a horse, green hands from handling metal, a stooped walk, high-pitched voice, and was always wearing at least three layers of overcoats."

The actor also created his own "back-story" for Fagin's character, in which the young Fagin was orphaned early in life and raised by his immigrant Russian Jewish grandparents, who spoke no English. ■

Biloxi shul gets help

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — When Rabbi Sam Kieffer flew over Biloxi, Miss., all he could see below was complete devastation. "From the plane, you see almost every rooftop covered in blue tarp" indicating extensive damage, he says.

Kieffer and his wife, Melinda, of B'nai Aviv, a Conservative congregation in Weston, Fla., and Harry Silverman, the southeastern regional director for the umbrella group United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, were on a one-day spiritual-relief mission Sept. 21 to Biloxi's beleaguered Congregation Beth Israel, the only synagogue on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

All the Jewish movements have reached out generously to hurricane victims, sending money, food and clothing to Jews and non-Jews alike. But this was a rare mission focused on spiritual support.

Like the half-dozen devastated congregations in the New Orleans area, Biloxi's Beth Israel was slammed hard by Hurricane Katrina. The synagogue building was badly damaged and cannot be used. But worse than that, 13 of the congregation's 65 families lost their homes. Other homes are uninhabitable.

"Some may choose to rebuild. We don't know," says the congregation's president, Steve Richer. "Some of our members have already moved away permanently."

Throughout the areas hardest hit by Katrina, food, clothing, shelter and above all cash, is sorely needed by everyone, says Richer, who also serves as the executive director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau.

But the emotional damage is just as extensive, with families separated, job futures uncertain and lifetimes of memories literally swept away in the relentless floodwaters.

"Quite frankly, it's a very stressful situation for everybody," Richer says. "Driving around, you see parts of houses, people's personal memorabilia lying in the street. It's really tough, especially for the children. You get to the point where it's too numbing to focus on the individual tragedy."

With his own home under a foot of water, Richer was in Florida recently buying

a mobile home to drive back to Biloxi, so he'll have something to live in. "All the mobile homes in Mississippi are sold out," he reports.

It was to bring some much-needed moral support to the shaken Beth Israel community that Silverman and the Kieffers flew to Biloxi in a private plane belonging to David Keller, the president of Temple Beth Israel, a Conservative synagogue in Sunrise, Fla. ■

The visitors met with about 30 people in Biloxi, including congregants and children, some of whom were Jewish evacuees from Louisiana. They gathered in one congregant's office, which he was now living in, as his own home was destroyed.

Kieffer talked quietly with the adults, offering counseling and grief support, while Melinda Kieffer did a High Holidays arts-and-crafts session with the dozen children.

"We made Rosh Hashanah cards, and I asked them to make a wish for the New Year,"

she reports. "They said, 'Can we wish the hurricane didn't come?'"

Afterward, the Kieffers presided over a healing service for the entire group. Then they sat down to a kosher-deli lunch that Silverman had brought on the plane and handed out "Shabbat bags" containing candles, challahs and kosher grape juice prepared by the Kieffers' Florida congregation.

The Biloxi Jews were "very reluctant" to take the food, Melinda Kieffer says. "One woman said to me, 'We're Jews. We give, we don't take.'"

The visitors left \$30,000 with the congregation, to fund rebuilding the synagogue and for distribution to its needy members and to the larger community.

It wasn't the first spiritual-sustenance visit to Biloxi from a Jewish group. On Sept. 9, two rabbis from the Union for Reform Judaism counseled people at the Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Miss., which had taken in more than 100 displaced Jews from Biloxi and New Orleans. Four yeshiva students from the fervently Orthodox group Chabad-Lubavitch arrived soon after Hurricane Katrina. They helped clean up the synagogue and counseled the devastated congregants. ■

'One woman said to me, "We're Jews. We give, we don't take."'

Melinda Kieffer

Visitor to Mississippi synagogue

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Bolton: Anti-Israel bias still a problem

Breaking the pattern of anti-Israel bias at the United Nations requires "continued vigilance," the U.S. ambassador to the international body said.

Testifying Wednesday at a session of the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee, John Bolton said there was some improvement in U.N. attitudes, but bias against the Jewish state remains an issue.

"The problem of anti-Israel bias in the United Nations, I'm sad to say, continues. It's a fact. There are a number of things that we need to do on that score," Bolton said. "It will require continuing vigilance."

From Rome to Jerusalem

The Vatican lent rare Jewish manuscripts to the Israel Museum.

A new exhibit celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem includes an illustrated manuscript of Moses Maimonides' Mishneh Torah in the original Hebrew, on loan from the Vatican.

Also on display from papal archives are Jacob ben Asher's Arba'ah Turim from 1435, as well as a complete Hebrew Bible code of laws and a book of Psalms, both produced in Rome in the 13th century, among the earliest such manuscripts in existence.

Czech police demoted after skinhead concert

Two Czech police officials were punished for failing to curtail a concert of neo-Nazi groups.

The officers were demoted for their failure to act at the concert held earlier this month during which some of the 500 participants chanted "Seig Heil" and the name of Rudolf Hess, one of Hitler's key aides.

Dutch Railways sorry for wartime behavior

The head of Dutch Railways apologized for the company's role in deporting Jews during World War II.

"I apologize from the depths of my heart and in all humility," Aad Veenman said at the launch of an anti-racism campaign, a collaboration between Dutch Railways and the Central Jewish Organization for External Relations. "From the ritual of commemoration we want to move to 'doing something,'" he added.

Posters will be displayed in train stations throughout the Netherlands with slogans such as, "The train to Auschwitz used to leave here. When will the world learn?" and "In '40-'45 the Jews had to get out. Who's next? ... Don't revive the hate."

NORTH AMERICA

Pentagon wants Israeli arms-oversight law

The United States wants Israel to pass legislation mandating U.S. oversight of Israeli arms sales.

Members of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee who met this week with Pentagon officials would not discuss the proposed agreement, which would allow Israel to resume full military cooperation with the United States.

The Pentagon suspended aspects of the relationship in recent years because of Israel's sales of military equipment to China. Most significantly, Israel has been frozen out of the development of the Joint Strike Fighter, a state-of-the-art combat aircraft.

DeLay gets pro-Israel plaudits

A pro-Israel group of Christians and Jews gave Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas) a standing ovation hours after he stepped aside from his

Republican leadership position because of a criminal indictment.

DeLay, who stepped aside Wednesday as House of Representatives majority leader, made a scheduled appearance at a dinner in Washington for the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, an organization that partners pro-Israel evangelicals with Jews.

DeLay has been a staunch backer of Israel, especially pro-settler groups, and has expressed skepticism on Israel's recent decision to pull out of the Gaza Strip.

MIDDLE EAST

Israelis warn of Iran strike

Israeli lawmakers on a visit to Washington hinted that Israel one day could resort to military force to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons.

Delegates from the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee who held talks with members of Congress warned that if the United States does not rein in Iran's nuclear program, Israel will.

"We sacrificed 6 million Jews because the Western world did not understand what Hitler intended," said delegate Yosef "Tommy" Lapid. "We are not willing to sacrifice another 6 million Israelis because the world does not understand the mullahs of Iran."

The committee, a parliamentary body, does not speak for the Israeli government. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has said that Israel has no plans to attack Iran.

Sharon rules out further unilateralism

Ariel Sharon reaffirmed Israel's commitment to the "road map" to peace with the Palestinians.

After several Israeli officials suggested this week that the government might follow up the Gaza Strip withdrawal with further unilateral moves, Sharon issued a denial Thursday.

"This country is plagued by rumors. Yesterday one such rumor began making the rounds, a rumor emanating from unfounded comments and claiming Israel was examining other plans," the prime minister said in a speech to a Tel Aviv business convention.

Gaza crackdown begins

The Palestinian Authority announced a ban on unlicensed weapons in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Authority police were given orders Thursday to round up guns from terrorist factions and, thereafter, to arrest anyone seen in public with an unlicensed weapon, Gaza officials said.

The decision came hours after two Palestinian Authority policemen were wounded in a clash with gunmen who tried to approach Gaza's border with Israel.

The round-up of weapons, while likely to be welcomed by Israel, falls short of the Palestinian Authority's obligation under the U.S.-led "road map" to dismantle terrorist groups.

Arab riot case re-examined

Israel's Justice Ministry is re-examining a decision not to prosecute police who killed 13 Arab rioters in October 2000.

Ministry officials said Thursday's decision did not constitute the opening of new investigations against police snipers and commanders implicated in the deaths, but aimed to assess whether the Internal Affairs Unit had been too hasty to determine that there was not enough evidence for criminal charges.

Six Arab lawmakers called off a hunger strike they launched over the issue and said they would resume protests if convictions are not secured.