



IN THE NEWS

Israeli agency offers help to Jordan

Israel's relief agency offered medical aid to Jordan following Wednesday's triple bombing in Amman.

Magen David Adom made the offer following blasts at three hotels, which reportedly killed at least 53 people.

Magen David Adom also contacted its Jordanian counterpart to offer blood supplies.

Berlin hosts Kristallnacht ceremony

Berlin's Jewish community marked Kristallnacht.

Recalling the Nov. 9, 1938, pogrom against synagogues and Jewish property, about 250 Jews and non-Jews walked Tuesday night down a street that once held many Jewish-owned stores.

Speakers urged vigilance in the face of recent anti-Semitic vandalism in Berlin and demonstrations by neo-Nazis in other German cities.

Some onlookers said they appreciated being reminded of this chapter of history.

Group denounces Iranian president

American Jews and leaders of other faiths demanded that Iran's president be held accountable for calling for Israel's destruction.

The Ad Hoc Coalition for Justice, an interfaith group formed in the aftermath of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Oct. 26 call to destroy Israel, held a press conference and rally in New York on Wednesday across from the Iranian Mission to the United Nations.

"As everyone in this audience knows, too many Jews in Germany did not think Hitler meant it," said Richard Holbrooke, a former American ambassador to the United Nations. "When a leader of a country says something as outrageous and as vile as what has been said by the Iranian president — or by Hitler — we must take notice and we must tell them that he and his government must retract it, and they must apologize."

WORLD REPORT

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Some Jewish groups tackle budget cuts, but avoid tax cut

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Several Jewish organizations are reaching out to lawmakers, hoping to minimize budget cuts that could hurt the bottom line for numerous Jewish social service programs, but many are avoiding a related fight over tax cuts.

Jewish leaders privately acknowledge that pressure to avoid addressing the five-year, \$70 billion tax cut being debated in Congress this year stems from prominent Republican donors in the Jewish community.

A plea from the Reform movement last week against the tax cuts was notable for the lack of signatories.

"A number of organizations were not comfortable with the language on tax cuts," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the movement's Religious Action Center, which initiated the letter to members of Congress.

Jewish leaders acknowledge that much of the pressure to lay off taxes comes from major donors who benefit from the cuts, and others who aren't keen to take on a White House that has been accused of freezing out critics.

The House of Representatives is weighing large cuts to Medicaid and food stamp programs, among others, for a total savings of \$54 billion over the next five years. The Senate passed a bill last week that trimmed \$35 billion over five years.

Jewish leaders say the cuts mean the federal government will serve fewer people, increasing pressure on private groups while budgets that are heavily reliant on federal programs inevitably shrink.

"There clearly are going to be people falling

through the cracks," said William Rapfogel, executive director of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty in New York. "Those will be the people that are coming to us."

The RAC letter was circulated to numerous Jewish groups, but only a few major groups signed on, including B'nai B'rith International and the National Council of Jewish Women.

"After investing billions in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast, many in Congress now say that the federal government must now tighten its belt," the letter said. "We certainly understand the need for fiscal responsibility. However, any claims to fiscal prudence on the part of budget reconciliation's proponents are undermined by the \$70 billion in tax cuts proposed alongside the spending reductions."

Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said the tax cuts were important because they're intended to boost tax revenues and stimulate the economy.

"The tax cuts are working, the economy is being stimulated," he said. "But at the end of the day, spending has to be brought under control in a prudent manner."

Brooks said a "shared sacrifice" was necessary, especially in the wake of the hurricanes that hit the Southeast this year.

Notably absent among signatories to the RAC letter were two groups actively engaged in poverty and social service issues — the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella organization and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Stephan Kline, UJC's director of government affairs, said the federation system has not taken a position on tax cuts in recent

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■ *Leading Republican Jews pressed groups to avoid addressing a proposed tax cut*

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years. Instead, he said, the organization is focusing primarily on eliminating an expansion of rules governing the transfer of assets.

Under the proposed law, Medicaid applicants would be barred from receiving coverage for five years after transferring assets; the current law stipulates a three-year period.

Kline said the changes could put a significant strain on Jewish social services. He estimates that half of the \$5 billion to \$7 billion that Jewish federations and affiliated agencies receive from public funding sources comes from the federal government.

"If you cut a program by 10 percent, then hypothetically you would expect 10 percent of our funding to be cut," Kline said. He estimates that close to 1 percent of Medicaid funds go to Jewish institutions.

Budget cuts have garnered national attention and rallied numerous liberal constituencies, but the Jewish community has not spoken loudly on the issue. Ethan Felson, JCPA's assistant executive director, suggested there's a limit to the Jewish community's influence on the budget.

"What the community can do and needs to do is identify key programs that are slated to be cut and make sure the recipients of those programs are protected," he said.

JCPA has identified several programs for preservation, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and the Supplemental Security Income for poor, elderly and disabled people.

Felson said the cuts "are the opposite of where the country needs to be going, and they would decimate the social service delivery system of which the Jewish community is so proud."

Republicans say their cuts target waste and inefficiency, and put the burden back on individual states. For example, the Medicaid legislation would allow state governments to receive a co-payment on additional services provided to the poorest Americans.

Rapfogel said it's hard to estimate the exact impact budget cuts would have on the community. But he said eliminating people from Medicaid and food-stamp rolls would leave a larger number of people seeking alternative assistance from sources like his organization.

Already, Jewish groups provide extensive help to the "near poor," those who are

not eligible for federal assistance but cannot make it on their own.

The number of households receiving kosher meals from the Met Council each month has risen from 5,000 in 2001 to 13,000 this year.

Rapfogel said he agrees with Republicans who say there's too much waste in the federal programs, but he fears needy people will be adversely affected as Congress trims the fat.

"We don't want to take a chance and gamble that people will lose benefits they need to get basic

healthcare," he said. "It's not worth the gamble."

House Republican leaders were hoping to vote on the package Thursday. Some moderate GOP lawmakers are concerned about the cuts, the effect on their communities and the implications for next year's midterm congressional elections. ■

**The budget cuts
'are the opposite of
where the country
needs to be going.'**

Ethan Felson

JCPA

Singapore, a market gateway for Israelis

By GUY SHARETT

SINGAPORE (JTA) — A talking children's book, a box that send an alert to parents if their teenage child starts driving recklessly, a passport photo that conceals important data — these are a few of the inventions Israeli entrepreneurs showed recently at an international exhibition in Singapore.

But the attraction of Global Entrepolis isn't just that it allows Israeli inventors to meet potential investors who could help develop and sell their products. Singapore also is a regional hub for sizable markets like Indonesia and Malaysia, Muslim countries that do not have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

The most populous Muslim country in the world with more than 220 million people, Indonesia often is perceived as the Israelis' dream market.

Malaysia also does not allow trade with Israel, but Malaysian businessmen at Global Entrepolis showed interest in Israeli technology.

During the past seven years, the Singapore-Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation has helped 50 companies from Israel do business with Singaporean companies.

"Very often the Israelis are disappointed with the Singaporean side's technological capabilities, but what the Singaporeans give is mainly the market — access to adjacent Indonesia and Malaysia," said Shirley Refuah-Hasson of the foundation. "We try to make the Israelis understand it would be very difficult for them to reach those market without regional partners."

There also are cultural hurdles to contend with.

"Most Singaporeans do not understand the difference between Jewish and Israeli. The image of the Jews here is that they are smart but very shrewd, so many people are afraid to be associated with them," said the foundation's William Koo. "I tell them that I've been to Israel and that there's no reason to be afraid."

The Israeli Trade Ministry's Tnufa project helps entrepreneurs develop archetypes of their products and eventually get to exhibitions like Global Entrepolis, which was held in late September.

In the Israeli booth, attendees were able to see an invention called "Protector," which can locate a car in motion, send an SMS alert to the phone of the car's driver or owner with the vehicle's location and serve as the car's black box in case of accidents. ■

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Jewish voters help Bloomberg get re-elected

By HEATHER ROBINSON

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish voters in New York City, traditionally a solid Democratic voting bloc, helped re-elect Michael Bloomberg as mayor this week. Then again, Bloomberg isn't a traditional Republican.

Bloomberg, New York City's Republican incumbent mayor, sailed to an overwhelming victory in Tuesday's mayoral election, with a large boost from New York's Jewish voters, who appear to have supported him in greater proportions than the general population.

With 99 percent of the vote counted, Bloomberg had received 58 percent to Democratic challenger Fernando Ferrer's 39 percent. Although no poll numbers on the Jewish vote were immediately available, a Quinnipiac University poll of likely Jewish voters conducted Monday found Bloomberg to have a lead of nearly 5-1 over Ferrer.

Some political analysts and community leaders say Jewish support of Bloomberg reflects the increased willingness of Jewish New Yorkers to cross party lines.

"I don't think it portends any weakening of the Democratic Party for Jews in general," Ed Koch, the former Democratic mayor of New York and a Bloomberg supporter, told JTA.

Jews "have the common sense to cross party lines when they distinguish between candidates they have to rely on for everyday services. Jewish voters have concluded the mayor has done a great job, and common sense dictates you don't replace what's working."

Koch mentioned Bloomberg's own Jewishness as possibly a "minor factor" in the large Jewish turnout for him.

David Pollock, associate executive director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council, which focuses on community building and organized a series of news conferences with the candidates for New York's large Russian Jewish community, also emphasized the pragmatism of Jewish voters.

"There's an increased willingness on the part of New York's Jewish voters to ignore party labels and vote in pragmatic fashion," he said. "Jews are looking for a well-run city and a candidate who can address quality-of-life issues."

Bloomberg has made such issues the focal points of his administration — pass-

ing, for instance, a smoking ban in restaurants and bars that was championed by the public health community.

Strong Jewish support for Republican mayoral candidates is not unprecedented in New York City, where Republican politicians have a history of combining strict law enforcement policies with moderate-to-liberal stances on social issues.

Rudy Giuliani received support from a majority of New York Jewish voters over Democrat Ruth Messinger, who is Jewish, in 1997.

And in 2001, a majority of Jewish voters supported Bloomberg over Democrat Mark Green, who is also Jewish.

Some analysts and community leaders point out that during Bloomberg's mayoralty, crime rates are even lower than they were during Giuliani's rule. This decrease, they say — and Jewish voters' perceptions that Bloomberg will continue to maintain Giuliani's effective law enforcement policies — accounts for heavy Jewish support for him, especially in a city that suffered the trauma of Sept. 11.

"The Jewish vote is often a security vote — anti-crime and anti-terror," said Fred Siegel, a professor at Cooper Union and the author of "Prince of the City," a book on Giuliani. "Giuliani was highly appealing in these areas, and Bloomberg is somewhat so." Ferrer, he says, "has nothing to offer in this area."

Some cited Bloomberg's anti-terrorism innovations, including stationing police detectives overseas as a source of counterterrorism intelligence for the city, and the mayor's support for Israel, as appealing to the Jewish voters in this year's election. Still others cited education, with test scores for New York's primary-school children having improved, and job growth in all five boroughs.

But Messinger, who ran for mayor in 1997 and is currently the president of the American Jewish World Service, attributed Bloomberg's landslide victory at least partially to his personal wealth.

"The mayor has accomplished some things that please people and he does get credit for his accomplishments," she said.

"But in spending" millions of dollars, "he totally violated the intention of campaign finance law.

"His opponent's arguments couldn't be put forward loudly and visibly because of the mismatch in money."

Across the city, polling stations saw moderate to heavy traffic as voters turned out well into the balmy evening.

In Stuyvesant Town, a rent-stabilized housing complex on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Jewish voters seemed roughly split in their choice for mayor.

"Crime is low, I like Bloomberg's education reforms and he's kept everything running and getting better over the past four years," said Alex Levin, 29, a political independent and vice president of technology for a software company. "I didn't see any reason not to vote for Bloomberg."

Some Jewish voters did, however.

While the mayor's education policies have been beneficial to some children, they have not benefitted others, including dropouts, contended Democrat Wanda Caine, 47, a public high school teacher. For this reason, she says, she voted for Ferrer.

"I know Ferrer won't win," she said. "But I wanted my vote to show that I don't think Bloomberg's the last word in education."

In the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, Orthodox Jews flocked into several polling places right up until the 9 p.m. closing time.

Outside one school, a diminutive man in Orthodox clothing stood at a table explaining the ballot in Yiddish to several older people — and in a combination of Yiddish and English to a young mother who came to vote with her twin boys. He also stamped slips of paper, which he said granted small prizes to schoolchildren whose parents turned out to vote.

"He's very good," Ida Steinmetz, a social worker, said of Bloomberg. "He helps for crime and jobs and schools, and he's shown himself to be a good mayor."

Several other observant voters wished to remain anonymous, and all but one of a dozen said they were voting for Bloomberg.

The dissenter, a burly man who declined to give his name, asserted that his vote for Ferrer was an anti-Bloomberg vote.

"They say if he wins, parking tickets will go up," he said.

'Jews are looking for a well-run city and a candidate who can address quality-of-life issues.'

David Pollock

JCRC

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

State Dept. broadens Israel critique

The U.S. State Department's latest religious freedom report expands the examination of religious minorities' status in Israel.

The report, released this week, placed special attention on non-Orthodox streams of Judaism.

It reported "no change" in the state of religious freedom in Israel and Palestinian-controlled areas. It said Israel "discriminates against non-Jewish citizens and residents, the vast majority of whom are Arab Muslims and Christians, in the areas of employment, education, and housing."

It also described as a "problem" Israel's "recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil-status matters concerning Jews."

The 2005 report was more expansive in addressing the status of religious minorities beyond the focus in previous years on the government's relations with Orthodox Jews, Muslims and indigenous Christians.

The report for the first time described a small community of Messianic Jews in Israel, and noted the diversity of faiths among immigrant workers.

The report also repeated previous concerns about whether the supremacy accorded Islam in draft versions of a Palestinian constitution would "translate into an effective legal protection of religious freedom." It also noted Palestinian incitement against Jews.

Jewish leaders back religious freedom act

Jewish community leaders will speak about the merits of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Employer-Employee Relations Subcommittee of the House Education and Workforce Committee will hold hearings on the act Thursday.

Sponsored by Rep. Mark Souder (R-Ind.) and Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-N.Y.), the bill would give employees the right to seek accommodations for their religious practices as long as they don't create undue hardships for employers.

Richard Foltin, legislative director of the American Jewish Committee, will testify.

The bill has been a cornerstone of several Jewish groups' legislative agendas.

Jewish campus gets \$15 million gift

Two Jewish foundations pledged \$15 million to build a Jewish center in California's Silicon Valley.

The donation from the Koret Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture is the largest combined gift received to date for the Taube-Koret Campus for Jewish Life.

The Palo Alto campus, which will house social agencies, a gym and senior residences, will cost about \$200 million and is expected to open in 2008.

Its target population is the fast-growing Jewish community of the South Peninsula, just south of San Francisco, which has increased by 150 percent since 1986.

MIDDLE EAST

Israelis vote for Labor chief

Israel's Labor Party held a primary vote.

Shimon Peres, the incumbent Labor chief, is expected to keep the helm in the election that began Wednesday, as his rivals, Amir Peretz and Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, have trailed far behind him in opinion polls.

Victory for Peres would bolster Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's

national unity government, in which Labor is a partner.

But Peres, 82, has hinted that with Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip complete, he may take Labor out of the coalition and run for prime minister in the next national elections.

Plan would increase Ethiopians in Israel

Ethiopian and Israeli government officials signed an understanding Wednesday that would double the rate of Ethiopian immigration to Israel.

The 20,000 Falash Mura who have been waiting, some of them for years, to come to Israel are descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity, but have since returned to Judaism.

Hundreds of Falash Mura staged a hunger strike in Addis Ababa in September, claiming the immigration process has been going too slowly.

The Jewish Agency for Israel has been charged with upgrading the compounds in Addis Ababa and Gondar, where much of the community is living while waiting to emigrate.

Jewish Agency staff members are to run Hebrew and Judaism classes, as well as courses in modern living, to prepare the community for life in Israel.

The United Jewish Communities, the North American federation umbrella organization, will help fund the operation to bring the remainder of the Falash Mura community to Israel.

Hamas sees possible talks with Israel

A Hamas leader suggested his group one day could hold talks with Israel.

"A negotiation is a method. If the method enables us to liberate our land, to liberate our people from Israeli jails, to reconstruct what was destroyed by Israel in its long-standing occupation, at that time we can discuss," Mahmoud Zahar, the Hamas chief in the Gaza Strip, told Israel Radio in a rare interview Wednesday.

Israeli officials dismissed the remarks as a bid by Hamas to soften its hard-line image ahead of Palestinian Authority parliamentary elections in January, in which the Islamic terrorist group is taking part for the first time.

Zahar previously has hinted that Hamas could amend its charter, which currently calls for the Jewish state's destruction, if political conditions are right.

WORLD

Groups press Germany on combating anti-Semitism

The American Jewish Committee called for Germany's new government to take an active role against anti-Semitism.

At a news conference Wednesday with representatives of several non-governmental organizations, Deidre Berger, head of the AJCommittee's Berlin office, announced a list of demands, including publishing a yearly report on anti-Semitism, including the issue in foreign policy and increasing support for educational and public programs against xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

There was no government reaction to the statement.

Bnei Menashe conversion program halted

Israel halted efforts to convert the Bnei Menashe, an Indian community of "hidden Jews."

The Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that a campaign to convert the 7,000 Bnei Menashe remaining in India, using members of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, had been called off following protests from New Delhi.

Some 800 Bnei Menashe, believed to be descended from one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, have already moved to Israel.