

## IN THE NEWS

## Russia: Rabbi can't come back

Russia is not allowing Moscow's chief rabbi to return to Russia at the current time, the country's Internal Affairs Ministry said.

In a letter publicized Tuesday, the ministry said Pinchas Goldschmidt would not be allowed to return to Russia for now.

The letter cited an article in Russian legislation that prevents foreigners who are deemed threats to Russian national security from entering the country. [Story, Pg. 3]

## Israeli election set for March 28

Israeli elections will take place March 28.

The date was set Tuesday following wrangling between President Moshe Katsav and representatives of various Knesset factions.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had wanted Katsav to dissolve Parliament unilaterally, which would have set elections for March 7 — too soon for factions, that want time to mount political campaigns.

In the interim period, Sharon will be able to appoint ministers to his caretaker Cabinet without Knesset approval.

After quitting the Likud on Monday, the prime minister is expected to lose ministers from the ruling party as well as from the Labor Party, which wants to leave the governing coalition.

## Shalom, Mofaz join Likud race

Silvan Shalom announced that he would run for the leadership of Israel's Likud Party.

The foreign minister threw his hat into the ring Tuesday, joining Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz on what is expected to be a long list of Likud officials who want the top job vacated by Ariel Sharon.

The front-runner in Dec. 19 party primaries is former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Education Minister Limor Livnat also is expected to run.

# WORLD REPORT

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## At Reform conference, movement calls for a push toward conversion

By SUE FISHKOFF

**H**OUSTON (JTA) — The movement that was the first to welcome intermarried families into its synagogues nearly three decades ago now will focus on actively inviting non-Jews to convert to Judaism.

That was one of the initiatives announced by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, during his Shabbat sermon at the movement's 68th biennial here.

More than 4,200 Reform Jews from 504 congregations in nine countries, most from the United States, attended the four-day event at the George R. Brown Convention Center, which most recently sheltered thousands of Gulf Coast evacuees from Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane relief, aid to Sudanese refugees in Darfur and opposition to the Iraq war were other major topics at the conference.

The atmosphere at the biennial was decidedly upbeat, reflecting the confidence of what the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey pronounced the country's largest Jewish stream.

Addressing a Shabbat breakfast meeting of Reform rabbis, cantors and educators, sociologist Steven Cohen, a research professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, said the Reform movement is the institution best placed to lead the American Jewish community.

"The federation system has abdicated," he said, "the Conservative movement doesn't have the wherewithal or the confidence" and the "Orthodox have become sectarian," Cohen said.

No one in the room disagreed with his analysis.

Neither did Rabbi David Ellenson, president of the Hebrew Union College.

"There is an affinity between the ideals marking Reform Judaism — inclusion, pluralism, the individual search for meaning — and the sensibilities that mark most non-Orthodox Jews in the United States," he said.

Referring to the 20 percent of American Jews who have never affiliated with a synagogue, he said, "if any movement is going to address these people and bring them into the synagogue, it's the Reform movement."

That confidence was evident in Yoffie's Shabbat sermon, in which he urged Reform congregations to find tangible ways to honor non-Jewish members who are raising Jewish children, while not shying away from suggesting that these non-Jews convert.

The union has prepared programs to help synagogues implement both ideas.

Noting that fewer non-Jewish spouses are converting to Judaism than the movement expected when it instituted its open-arm policy toward interfaith families in 1978, Yoffie suggested that perhaps "by making non-Jews feel comfortable and accepted in our congregations, we have sent the message that we do not care if they convert."

On the contrary, Yoffie continued, "it is a mitzvah to help a potential Jew become a Jew-by-choice." In fact, he said, "we owe them an apology" for not inviting them to convert sooner.

"Conversion first is always desirable"  
*Continued on page 2*

FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES

## ■ At the Reform biennial, a half dozen workshops were devoted to intermarriage

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though not always possible, Yoffie said, "so we have to welcome the non-Jewish spouse and embrace them, to the extent that they are raising Jewish children."

Yoffie's conversion initiative met with only a smattering of applause from the 3,000 attendees at Saturday morning services, in contrast to the loud approval that greeted his call for honoring non-Jewish parents raising Jewish children, his plea that Reform religious schools not accept students who are also being educated in another faith, and his criticism of the religious right.

Afterward, however, people seemed to agree with Yoffie's approach.

Inviting non-Jews to convert "is nothing new, it's just fallen by the wayside," said Steven Joachim of Temple Emanu-El in Atlanta, as his lunch companions nodded their agreement. All of them said they should be more open in discussing conversion with their non-Jewish friends in the synagogue.

The challenge of balancing openness to the intermarried while encouraging conversion is a major challenge for Reform congregations, movement leaders agree.

"On one hand, the Reform movement has to be welcoming, while at the same time conversion has to be presented as an optimal alternative," said Ellenson, who called Yoffie's approach "a move toward tradition."

Reacting to the suggestion that the new initiative brings the Reform approach to conversion ever closer to that of the Conservative movement — which will be unveiling its own, more liberal outreach initiative at

its Dec. 4-8 biennial in Boston — Ellenson called it "an example of the homogeneity of the non-Orthodox Jewish community in America today."

The topic was well represented at the biennial, with half a dozen workshops devoted to outreach and intermarriage.

"How many of your congregations have a policy on non-Jewish participation?" asked Rabbi Brian Beal of Temple Beth Torah in Nyack, N.Y., at a session devoted to the role of non-Jews in synagogue life. Just six out of 45 people in the room raised their hands.

Several people at that workshop said more than half the members of their congregations were intermarried, and not having clear guidelines led to confusion and hurt.

Kathy Kahn, the union's outreach director, said most Reform congregations set limits on what non-Jews may do in ritual life and synagogue governance, though some do not.

Jamie Hendi of Congregation Kol Ami in Frederick, Md., said her 60-member congregation is just tackling the issue, and "emotions are very high."

"We have three intermarried families who were able to do everything, because we didn't have a policy. They feel very threatened now that we'll take things away from them," she said.

Rabbi Arnie Gluck of Temple Beth-El in Hillsborough, N.J., said his synagogue prepared a policy booklet outlining what non-Jews may and may not do, along with the reasoning behind each decision.

"People appreciate knowing our boundaries," he said.

Having a clearly outlined position can encourage conversion by enhancing the value of becoming a Jew, he added, pointing out that he has converted close to 100 people in his 15 years as rabbi of his 550-member congregation.

Some Reform Jews would prefer fewer limits. Debbie Kujovich of Congregation Kol Ami in Vancouver, Wash., said most of her congregation is intermarried, yet her non-Jewish husband is not permitted to hold the Torah during services.

"There are still lots" of barriers, she noted, which makes it hard for the Jews

in her congregation to convince their non-Jewish spouses to come to synagogue.

"My husband is not going to convert, yet I have to create a good environment for him in the congregation so I can participate," she said.

Rabbi Judith Schindler of Temple Beth El in Charlotte, N.C., said she came from a congregation where Jews sat on one side of the sanctuary and non-Jews on the other, and the Torah was passed

only to the Jews. At Beth El, by contrast, "we don't set those boundaries. The only thing they can't do is sit on the board."

That welcoming attitude has not discouraged conversion, Schindler insisted, noting that she has 40 students in her conversion class, and about two convert every month.

"That 'doesn't mean we should stand on street corners' and proselytize, she said, "although that's what my dad would have wanted."

She was referring to her father, the late Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the renowned former head of the Reform movement and author of the movement's 1978 outreach initiative.

Social justice and social action projects were front and center at this biennial, but many sessions continued the Reform movement's increased focus on worship and tradition, the major emphasis of its last biennial.

A preview edition of the soon-to-be-released Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, was unveiled at Friday night and Saturday morning services. Laid out in a two-page format, with the traditional liturgy on each right-hand page and alternative readings and meditations on the left, it transliterates every Hebrew prayer to encourage Reform congregations to use more Hebrew in their services.

Several options were offered at the biennial for daily shacharit morning and ma'ariv evening services, including a yoga minyan each morning and services conducted entirely in Hebrew, a novelty in the Reform movement.

A new addition was a *beit midrash*, or study hall, held at the same time as each worship service. Participants studied Torah in *chevruta*, the traditional partnering method used in yeshiva.



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# Russia won't let rabbi back in

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Moscow's chief rabbi will not be allowed to return to Russia for now, the country's Internal Affairs Ministry has decided.

The ministry's decision, written earlier this month in a letter that surfaced only this week, said Pinchas Goldschmidt was being kept out of Russia for national security reasons.

The issue comes as Russia's commitment to human rights increasingly is being questioned around the globe.

"Fortunately, the Jewish community has not been a target and has continued a supportive relationship with the Russian government, but when something like this happens, it makes people begin to wonder," said Mark Levin, the executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia.

The ministry's letter cites Article 27 of Russia's immigration law, which prevents foreigners who are deemed a threat to Russian national security from entering the country.

The security argument is the most tangible reason the Russian government has given for why it refused to allow Goldschmidt to re-enter the country from Israel in late September. A Swiss citizen

who has led Moscow's central synagogue for nearly 15 years, Goldschmidt had his visa annulled at a Moscow airport.

Goldschmidt had to take a return flight to Tel Aviv, and has remained in Israel since.

"This latest rejection shows how absurd the whole situation is for Rabbi Goldschmidt," Levin said. "To even have him considered a national security threat is ridiculous."

Levin said his

group would continue to inform governments around the world about the situation, saying the U.S., Israeli and Swiss governments have been pressing for Goldschmidt's return.

Until this week, Russian authorities had not provided an official explanation for Goldschmidt's ban, except for a vague Foreign Ministry comment saying the agency was looking into the situation.

Russian officials were unavailable for comment Tuesday.

Goldschmidt's wife, Dara, an American and the principal of a Moscow Jewish day school, and his five children, aged 5 to 15,

joined him in Israel in late September. They returned to Moscow last week because Dara had to return to work and the children had to attend school, Goldschmidt said.

Speaking from Israel, Goldschmidt said that after he was stopped at the airport he applied for a new visa but was refused.

"I'm being forcibly separated from my family," he told JTA.

A prominent Jewish community leader said Goldschmidt's situation could be linked to

government attempts to minimize foreign participation in the non-profit and religious sectors.

Russia is considering amending its law to make it harder for foreign groups and individuals to work in Russian non-profits.

The human-rights community has criticized the proposed amendments, which they see as an attempt to isolate Russia from Western countries. Minority religious groups, including Jewish groups, have remained calm, as the proposed measures may not affect their activities directly.

(JTA Foreign Editor Peter Ephross in New York contributed to this report.)

**'This latest rejection shows how absurd the whole situation is for Rabbi Goldschmidt.'**

**Mark Levin**

Executive director of NCSJ

**AROUND  
THE JEWISH  
WORLD**

## Reform congregations worry about post-Katrina future

By SUE FISHKOFF

HOUSTON (JTA) — There was poignancy at the opening session of the Union for Reform Judaism's biennial last week.

As 4,200 attendees rose to their feet inside the George R. Brown Convention Center, which had until just weeks ago sheltered more than 9,000 survivors of Hurricane Katrina, about 40 members of the Reform movement's four Gulf Coast congregations, including all four rabbis, paraded to the front of the auditorium carrying Torahs rescued from Katrina's waters. The Torahs would later be used during the biennial's Shabbat services.

"The pictures only provided a glimpse of the reality," said Rabbi Robert Loewy of Congregation Gates of Prayer in Metairie, La. "Thirty percent of our congregation's homes are uninhabitable. Another 30 percent are badly damaged. Our people are displaced," with businesses pondering how to make a living. "The challenges are mind-boggling and overwhelming."

Although the story has moved to the back pages of most newspapers, the misery caused by Katrina lingers, and its long-term effects can hardly be contemplated.

Rabbi Roy Walter of Congregation Emanu El in Houston told the crowd that 43,000 survivors are still being housed in Houston hotels and shelters, and 25,000 displaced children are attending local schools. They are what remains of the 250,000 evacuees who poured into Houston in early September.

The effect on Gulf Coast Jewish communities will be dramatic, predicted Daniel Freeland, the union's vice president, who was one of the first Jewish leaders to visit affected congregations.

"We assume that 25 to 40 percent of the Jewish community will not return," he said. Those who evacuated have found new jobs in Houston, Atlanta and Memphis, and their children are getting adjusted to new schools.

"If one-third of dues-paying members disappears, that will be devastating for the congregations," he said.

Rabbi Andy Busch of Touro Synagogue in New Orleans said 70 people showed up for services last week, but he has no idea how many of his congregation's 640 families are back in the city.

"People are coming back," he said. "They're nervous, but they're hopeful. Realistically, not everyone will return."

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Lawmakers want Hamas out

Six lawmakers introduced a resolution calling on the Palestinian Authority to prevent Hamas participation in upcoming elections.

U.S. Reps. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.), Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) and Michael McCaul (R-Texas) referred the resolution last Friday to the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee.

The Bush administration and Israel have expressed unhappiness with the fact that Hamas and other terrorist groups will run, but have said it's an internal Palestinian matter.

### Orthodox group to support Alito

A fervently Orthodox group will announce its support for Judge Samuel Alito for the U.S. Supreme Court.

The national officers of Agudath Israel of America authorized the organization to support Alito's candidacy for the high court, JTA has learned, and is reviewing the judge's record before making a formal announcement after Thanksgiving.

The Orthodox group has taken a different view from many Jewish organizations on issues such as reproductive rights and the constitutional separation of church and state.

The news comes after the Reform movement voted to oppose Alito's nomination.

### Jewish youth help Katrina evacuees

Children from the Young Judea youth movement and their families are giving out food, books and toys to children dislocated by Hurricane Katrina.

The caravan of trucks arrived in Jackson, Miss., on Monday evening to distribute the items collected along the East Coast over the past 10 days.

"From community to community, from house to house to house, person to person to person, we're making a difference right now," Yael Stern, 17, said as she helped load a truck in New Jersey on Sunday.

### Republicans blast Yoffie comments

The Republican Jewish Coalition blasted a Reform movement leader for comparing religious right groups to Hitler in their treatment of gays and lesbians.

"We cannot forget that when Hitler came to power in 1933, one of the first things that he did was ban gay organizations," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, said Saturday.

Matt Brooks, RJC's executive director, called the remarks "absolutely outrageous, unacceptable and offensive."

"To have the respected head of a major Jewish organization equate other people of faith with Hitler and the Nazis should not be tolerated in this society," Brooks said.

URJ spokeswoman Emily Grotta said Yoffie was making a historical reference. "He did not say the religious right was akin to Hitler," she said.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Sharon is boosted in polls

Ariel Sharon is likely to win a third term as Israeli prime minister as head of a new political party, polls predicted.

The surveys published Tuesday in Yediot Achronot and Ma'ariv gave Sharon's new party — which he tentatively named "National Responsibility" — between 30 and 33 of the Knesset's 120 seats in the next elections.

The biggest challenger, the Labor Party under new head Amir Peretz, was seen winning 25 to 26 seats.

The ruling Likud Party, which Sharon quit Monday because of opposition to his diplomatic program, got a projected 12 to 15 seats.

The findings suggest that even if Sharon is forced to appeal to parties other than Labor or Likud, he will still manage to form a coalition government after the elections, which are expected in March.

### Israel talks tough after border clash

Israel blamed Syria and Iran for a fierce clash with Hezbollah militiamen on its northern border.

"It is absolutely clear to us that Syria and the Iranians stand behind this Hezbollah operation," Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said Tuesday, referring to raids a day earlier in which four militiamen were killed and 11 Israeli troops wounded.

Lebanese officials said Hezbollah had tried and failed to kidnap Israeli soldiers in order to swap them for Arab prisoners held in Israel.

Mofaz said Syria, under mounting international scrutiny, approved the operation as a distraction.

Hezbollah is also backed by Iran. Israel shelled southern Lebanon in retaliation but ceased fire after U.N. peacekeepers conveyed an appeal from Beirut, Israel's military chief of staff said.

### Mubarak boosts Sharon

Egypt's president congratulated Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on his new path in Israeli politics. Sharon's office said Tuesday that he received a call from Hosni Mubarak in which the Egyptian said he was sure Sharon would succeed "on his new path."

Sharon, who quit his ruling Likud Party on Monday and vowed to set up a more centrist movement that would push for peace with the Palestinians, told Mubarak, "It was not an easy decision but I decided to set up a new party and I am certain that we will continue to work together as we have done in the past."

## WORLD

### French synagogue vandalized

A Molotov cocktail was thrown at a synagogue in a Paris suburb over the weekend.

Synagogue officials on Monday found the remains of an explosive device in the courtyard of the synagogue in Cachan.

A doorway and exterior walls were blackened, and a heating ventilator was destroyed.

Sammy Ghozlan, president of the Office of Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism, said in a statement that the attack was motivated by anti-Semitism.

Charges have been filed with police and an investigation is under way.

### Rome's Jewish museum reopens

Rome's redesigned and expanded Jewish museum opened with a high-profile ceremony.

Rome's mayor, Italy's culture minister and the presidents of the Lazio region and Rome province attended Tuesday's ceremony.

The museum, located in the complex housing Rome's main synagogue, originally opened in 1959 as a display of synagogue textiles and ritual objects.

It has been revamped and expanded to tell the 2,000-plus-year history of Jews in Italy as well as to showcase Judaica.

Financing came from the European Union and private sources as well as from state, city and regional authorities. About 65,000 people visited the museum last year.