

IN THE NEWS

Jordan keeps out Israel's Orthodox Jews

Jordan is preventing Orthodox Jewish Israelis from entering the country, ostensibly for fear they could be attacked, Israel's Foreign Ministry said.

The announcement came Wednesday as Jordan refused entry to eight Israeli tourists at a border crossing after prayer shawls and other religious items were found.

Foreign Ministry officials told Ha'aretz that Israeli officials have been trying to convince Jordan to change the policy.

Europe won't talk with Iran on nukes

Europe turned down Iran's offer to continue negotiating on its nuclear program.

Iran wanted to resume talks with European representatives, but was turned down Wednesday because of its recent resumption of uranium enrichment. The United States backed the rejection.

Western powers have called an emergency meeting early next month of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to consider whether to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council for sanctions.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he believes Russia or China would veto any sanctions effort.

Abbas seeks talks with Olmert

The Palestinian Authority president said he would like to meet Israel's Ehud Olmert for peace talks.

"I am ready to meet immediately with Interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to advance the peace process and negotiations," Mahmoud Abbas told reporters Wednesday.

Olmert, who assumed power when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was hospitalized with a stroke two weeks ago, has voiced interest in meeting with Abbas if Olmert wins Israel's March 28 election.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Limits on trips for U.S. lawmakers would affect Jewish, Israel lobbies

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In the wake of the Jack Abramoff scandal, Jewish groups are closely watching plans to restrict lawmakers' lobbyist-sponsored travel, which could have a devastating impact on Israel trips that build support for the Jewish state in Congress.

Rules proposed in Congress this month could place stringent restrictions on how lawmakers travel at the expense of lobbyists and the organizations connected to them.

The most aggressive plans call for restrictions on paying for legislators' hotel rooms and airfares, which could prevent them from traveling across the country to speak to interest groups such as American Jewish organizations.

Jewish lobbyists and advocates in Washington said they'll watch the proposed regulations closely when Congress returns to work later this month, worried that the rules could restrict legitimate travel.

"It could really change the access that elected officials have to their own constituencies," said Hadar Susskind, Washington director for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "If they can't speak and they can't come to Israel with their community leaders, it's a significant effect on their ability to understand their constituency and the issues that affect them."

Jewish groups have used trips to Israel as a key tool to help lawmakers, especially non-Jewish members of Congress, understand the significance of the Jewish state and its need for political support.

Such trips have helped the American Isra-

el Public Affairs Committee and other groups sensitize Congress to Israeli concerns.

"I don't think you can overstate how important it is," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

Jewish leaders say the trips change politicians' views on Israel.

For example, President Bush was said to be deeply moved during a 1998 trip to Israel as governor of Texas.

He formed strong ties with future Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on the visit, paid for by the RJC.

AIPAC has sent numerous lawmakers to Israel over the years through the American Israel Education Foundation.

In recent years, the group has sponsored separate trips of Democratic and Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives, led by Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the House Democratic whip, and Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), then the House majority whip.

These trips often include extensive travel in Israel and meetings with key political leaders.

The trips have been credited with helping lawmakers see controversial topics such as the West Bank security barrier and the Gaza Strip withdrawal in a light favorable to Israel.

Other organizations, including political groups and local federations, have sponsored similar trips.

Jewish leaders say the Republican proposals could hurt domestic priorities as well.

"These so-called reforms will have a devastating impact on the ability of all non-prof-

Continued on page 2

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ *A proposed travel restriction for congressmen would hinder trips to Israel*

Continued from page 1

its, including those in the Jewish community, to advocate on behalf of programs and issues that are important to us," said William Daroff, vice president for public policy at the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of North American Jewish federations. "It also makes it nearly impossible for us to bring members of Congress to local communities to see the programs they've entrusted by supporting."

Even programs like a recent trip for Jewish parliamentarians would be banned.

"It will be a large priority to make sure we have a seat at the table to craft out a policy that allows for bona fide, above-board advocacy and nonprofit organizations to be able to fund congressional travel," Daroff said.

■
The proposed legislation would not affect official congressional delegations, which are paid for by taxpayers.

A proposal, introduced Tuesday by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), would ban all privately sponsored travel for members of the House.

"I know fact-finding trips are important," Hastert said at a press conference. "This body considers legislation that affects people that cannot always travel to

Washington to petition the government. Private travel has been abused by some, and I believe we need to put an end to it."

Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) also proposed a plan Tuesday that stressed disclosure of travel and gifts and increased sanctions for violations.

Other proposals, by both Republican and Democratic leaders, are expected to be unveiled later this week.

One suggested rule, proposed by Rep.

David Obey (D-Wis.), would forbid lobbyists from paying for or participating in trips by lawmakers, and would prevent trips sponsored by organizations that perform any lobbying activities.

Many Jewish groups perform some lobbying activities and likely would be included in the ban, analysts said.

"Any member can travel anywhere they want to go; they've just got to do it on their own dime," said Ellis Brachman, an Obey spokesman.

The law would also restrict travel with organizations affiliated with lobbyists, which would affect separate educational funds that sponsor Israel trips, like the one AIPAC has created.

A spokesman for AIPAC would not comment on the proposed rule changes, but stressed the trips' substantive value for members of Congress.

"While in Israel, members have the opportunity to meet with both Israeli and Palestinian officials, hear from speakers representing diverse views across the political spectrum and get a personal, firsthand view of issues of great importance to American policy in the Middle East," spokesman Josh Block said.

■
Other ideas being considered include exempting non-profit organizations from the new regulations, which would allow Jewish groups to continue to operate as they currently do.

Jewish officials said they would wait to see what proposals are introduced before formulating a strategy.

But groups already are seeking potential allies to fight a travel ban.

They also are thinking of ways around the regulations, including taking congressional candidates to the Middle East before they're elected and subject to congressional restrictions.

Many Jewish leaders said they were in favor of some travel reform after the Abramoff scandal.

Several congressmen, including deposed House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas), are accused of taking lavish overseas trips paid for by lobbyists associated with Abramoff, an Orthodox Jew who opened a kosher deli and a religious school in the Washington area.

■
Abramoff pled guilty earlier this month to defrauding Indian tribes, enticing government officials with bribes and evading taxes.

"I think a total ban on travel, without the ability to look at what's behind the travel, is throwing the baby out with the bath water," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Some congressional aides have suggested registering trips and how they are funded, or having travel approved by a congressional oversight committee.



U.S. blocks Syrian's assets

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States blocked the assets of Syria's military intelligence chief, citing in part his support for Palestinian terrorists.

Wednesday's Treasury order denied Assef Shawkat access to any U.S. assets he might have, and Americans may not do business with him.

"As director of the Syrian military intelligence, Mr. Shawkat has been a key architect of Syria's domination of Lebanon and a contributor to serious, long-standing policy to support terrorism against Israel," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "And he is someone who has worked with terrorist organizations based in Syria, including Hezbollah and others, like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas."

Shawkat is the third senior Syrian official to have his assets blocked since last year.

JTA
WORLD
REPORT

Daniel J. Krifcher
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Noa Artzi-Weill
Marketing Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Theological questions may ignite exodus

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Some Conservative Jews were taken aback last month when Rabbi Neil Gillman urged the movement to stop calling itself halachic. But for Rabbi Bruce Ginsburg, Gillman simply confirmed what he'd been saying for 20 years.

"Until now there has been the widespread assumption in the Conservative movement that it is a halachic movement," or a movement that adheres to traditional Jewish law, said Ginsburg, president of the Union for Traditional Judaism, which was founded two decades ago by breakaways from the Conservative movement and which sits ideologically between Conservative Judaism and modern Orthodoxy.

"The announcement that Rabbi Gillman made, which was echoed by others, does create a very clear ideological and halachic divide in the Jewish community," he said.

Conventional wisdom holds that the Conservative movement has drifted to the left over the past 20 years. Now some are asking whether members of the movement's more traditional wing will jump ship in favor of the UTJ's more halachah-centered ideology.

Over the years, the Conservative movement has made moves that some have seen as contravening traditional rabbinic Jewish law.

In 1960, for example, the movement affirmed its decision to allow driving to its synagogues on Shabbat and holidays. Twenty years ago, it began ordaining female rabbis.

Since then it has wrestled with the issue of ordaining gay and lesbian rabbis, a move many insiders say is just a matter of time. Now there's Gillman's call, made in his keynote speech to the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's biennial conference in December.

Will the slow move to the left drive more traditional Conservative Jews into the UTJ's arms? Not in great numbers, UTJ insiders and observers say.

"I do suspect that there will be a few rabbis and possibly some congregations that will move into the camp of the UTJ," said Rabbi Ronald Price, the UTJ's executive vice president. But, he added, "even

though it's a turning point for the Conservative movement, I don't think there will be a sea change in terms of our growth."

Gillman, a philosophy professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative movement's flagship institution, said at the biennial that Conservative Judaism may be guided by halachah, or Jewish law, but it evolves

according to aggadah, or changing social and cultural norms.

It was an assertion that found backing among some rabbis and rank-and-file members of the movement. But other Conservative Jews said Gillman's comments were off base, insisting that halachah — interpreted through a Conservative lens — remains the basis of the movement's existence.

"I think that it's important to remember that Neil Gillman was really speaking for himself — as a philosopher, I suppose, or as someone who has thought a lot about the Conservative movement," said Rabbi Neil Cooper of suburban Philadelphia's Temple Beth Hillel-Beth El, a Conservative synagogue.

"He'll say our people, by and large, are not observing halachah. That's an opinion that he gathers from a rather removed perspective," Cooper said.

The UTJ is not a synagogue-based movement, though a few shuls have aligned themselves with the group. Essentially, it's an education and outreach organization whose members largely come from Orthodox shuls, in addition to those affiliated with Conservative and Reform congregations.

The UTJ's Institute of Traditional Judaism, headed by former JTS and Columbia University professor Rabbi David Weiss Halivni, offers rabbinical ordination, a beit midrash study program and continuing education for rabbis.

The movement believes in "open-minded observance." Its rabbinic program uses traditional methodologies along with critical approaches such as the study of Ugaritic and Akkadian.

But, says Price, "we start with a statement of faith" that Jewish texts "are sacred texts."

Synagogues connected to the UTJ are not uniform in their approach to egalitarianism: Some are more tolerant, others less so. The UTJ also stresses dialogue with non-halachic Jews and non-Jews.

Ginsburg's shul — Congregation Sons of Israel in Woodmere, N.Y.,

which is affiliated with United Synagogue — offers what he calls tri-seating: There's a men's section, a women's section and a mixed-seating section.

In a recent Op-Ed piece, UTJ leaders argued that Gillman had simply said out loud what many had known to be true for years.

"In some ways, the article that we wrote is simply our statement that we saw it coming," said Rabbi Ronald Price, UTJ's executive vice president. "I'm hoping that more people will understand that there is a need for what we call 'open-minded halachic Judaism,'" he added.

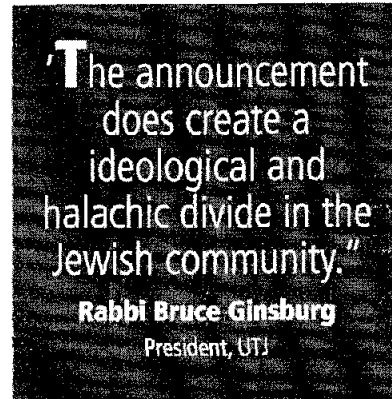
But Gillman — who says he supports the Conservative movement's perspective on Jewish observance and takes issue only with its self-identification as halachic — told JTA that in the 20 years since the Conservative movement decided to ordain women, the UTJ "has hardly had a raging success."

"What's going to make them is not my speech," he said. What would drive people into the UTJ's arms, he said, is if the Conservative movement's law committee approves the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis. "Then the UTJ is going to have a great burst of excitement."

While UTJ leaders say they hope growing numbers of people will flock to their kind of Jewish practice, Cooper isn't so sure.

"I think that the problem with the UTJ is that it's hard to convince people that you can have it both ways," he said. "That you can be an open, critical, historical, and liberal thinker on the one hand, but maintain on the other hand that there's no way for the halachah — even within that critical historical framework — to grow." ■

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES



NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

New foreign minister rebukes P.A.

Israel's new foreign minister rebuked the Palestinian Authority for letting Hamas run in upcoming elections.

"The Palestinian Authority election should have been part of a democratization process, but it is not. No democracy in the world would let terrorist groups run in its elections," Tzipi Livni said in her inaugural speech Wednesday.

She added that the Jan. 25 vote in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would not exempt the Palestinian Authority from its obligation to crack down on terrorist groups.

Peres: Negotiations after elections

Israel will launch peace talks with the Palestinians after Israeli elections, Shimon Peres told senior U.S. Republicans and Democrats.

The former Israeli prime minister and No. 2 on the Kadima Party list for March 28 elections said he believes Kadima would handily win the most seats and a Kadima-led government would open negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

Peres met with the officials Tuesday in Washington at a dinner hosted by the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation.

He currently holds no government position, but because of his senior status in Kadima he was scheduled to meet with Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state.

Labor presents list

Israel's Labor Party elected its Knesset candidate list.

The top slots in the list presented Wednesday by Labor chairman Amir Peretz include two young career politicians, Ofir Pines-Paz and Isaac Herzog; former Shin Bet security service chief Ami Ayalon; the former president of Ben-Gurion University, Avishai Braverman; and celebrity ex-journalist Shelly Yachimovich.

Political analysts noted the exclusion of candidates considered close to former Labor chairmen Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak, and said this signaled a party overhaul that could help Labor's chances in the March 28 election.

NORTH AMERICA

Poll: Teens into religion

Two-thirds of U.S. teenagers say religion and faith are important to them, a new survey says. But 39 percent of them are not sure how to connect to their religion, according to a poll commissioned by the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization.

Some 52 percent of 742 teens surveyed said they're looking for less conventional ways to connect with their religion.

In other findings, 72 percent of teenage girls say religion is important to them, compared to 64 percent of teenage boys.

Also, 92 percent of respondents want a better connection with their religion. BBYO has launched a Web site, b-linked.org, to provide an online community for Jewish teens around the world.

Group opens D.C. office

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, which tries to build support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, opened a Washington office. The group formally launched the office Tuesday at a Capitol Hill reception.

The office, run by Rob Levy, already has been operating for six weeks, and was active with other dovish groups in getting 108 U.S. representatives to sign a letter urging U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to intensify her involvement in the peace process.

WORLD

Australian editorial cartoon blasted

An anti-Sharon cartoon in one of Australia's leading newspapers is causing controversy.

Melbourne's leading broadsheet, *The Age*, printed a cartoon last week depicting two characters discussing Ariel Sharon's health.

One tells the other, "There was a small movement in his right arm."

The other character responds, "So he's fit enough to work. That's all the movement it takes to order a missile attack against an old Palestinian man in a wheelchair," a reference to Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin, whom Israel assassinated in 2004.

In 2002 Michael Leunig was responsible for a cartoon equating Nazi Germany and Israel.

Following letters condemning the recent cartoon, Leunig wrote an 800-word reply, saying, "My offending cartoon raises the very serious question of political assassinations and the moral ease with which they are conducted."

Raoul Wallenberg remembered

A ceremony was held in Argentina for the 61st anniversary of Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance.

Tuesday's ceremony, organized by the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation in the plaza that bears Wallenberg's name in Buenos Aires, honored the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II.

The principal speaker was Toti Flores, a leader of the Piqueteros, protest groups representing the poor and unemployed hit hard by Argentina's 2001-2002 economic crisis. Flores said Wallenberg's principles were honored in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of La Matanza, one of the poorest areas in Argentina.

"We named our community center with its bakery, employment service and child-care facilities after Wallenberg because we believe the courage he showed in saving Jews from the worst genocide known to mankind is an example to all of us," said Flores, who compared Wallenberg's disappearance after World War II to the thousands of Argentines who disappeared during the military dictatorship.

Other Wallenberg memorial services were held around the world.

Polish Jews open community office

The Jewish community of Poland will dedicate its first community offices in Lublin since World War II.

The office will open Sunday on the premises of the Yeshiva Hachmei Lublin, the most famous yeshiva in Europe before the Holocaust.

Up to 50 people registered as Jews live in Lublin, but Michael Schudrich, Poland's U.S.-born chief rabbi, says there may be many people of Jewish heritage who have not yet come forward since the Communist regime's anti-religious repression ended more than 15 years ago.

Pro-Israel program gets grant

A program that teaches pro-Israel advocacy to U.S. high-school students received a \$100,000 grant.

The matching grant for the Caravan for Democracy High School Education program, which prepares students to back Israel when they reach college, comes from the Koret Foundation.

The grant will support the program's efforts in schools in northern California.

The program is a joint project of the Jewish National Fund, Media Watch International and the American Friends of Likud.