

IN THE NEWS

Close race in Palestinian vote

Exit polls predicted a narrow victory for Fatah in Palestinian legislative elections.

One projection gave Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement a lead of 58-53 seats over Hamas in Wednesday's vote for the 132-seat Palestinian Legislative Council, while another gave Fatah a 63-58 victory.

The narrow margin raised the prospect that Hamas could take part in the next P.A. government.

U.S. won't talk to Hamas in P.A. gov't

The United States will not deal with Hamas if it joins a Palestinian government, spokesmen said, although they left open the possibility that the terrorist group is in transition.

"We do not deal with Hamas," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said Wednesday as Palestinians voted for a new legislature. "Hamas is a terrorist organization. Under current circumstances, I don't see any change in that."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack noted that Hamas did not emphasize its use of violence during its campaign.

Politician: Reform could cut Israel trips

A Minnesota senator said he was concerned that congressional trips to Israel could be cut under lobbying reform proposals.

Speaking at a hearing Wednesday of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Republican Norm Coleman said the American Israel Public Affairs Committee provides a service by sending lawmakers to Israel to meet its leaders.

Several congressional leaders and outside groups have proposed reforms that would curtail all private travel by members of Congress. Other reforms would allow non-profit groups to take legislators on trips.

WORLD REPORT

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Rebuffed in D.C., Jewish groups turning to states on social issues

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA)— With doors closing on them in Washington, social policy advocates in the Jewish community increasingly are looking for open windows.

Faced with a Congress that has been unreceptive to their policy initiatives and a Supreme Court likely to have two new conservative members, Jewish organizations say they're considering expanding their infrastructures at the state level, with the hope of making policy changes there that they can't get through Washington.

Advocates in the states are pressing for more resources, saying the future of battles on issues ranging from reproductive rights to life insurance for Israel travelers will be played out in state capitals.

"If and when Roe v. Wade is overturned, the ability of a woman to choose will really go back to the state legislatures," said Rabbi Fred Guttman of Greensboro, N.C., a member of the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action. "My feeling is the Jewish community is unprepared for this."

Much of the debate over Supreme Court nominees John Roberts and Samuel Alito has centered on abortion rights. Roberts joined the high court in September as chief justice; Alito was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday by a party-line vote, 10-8. His nomination is being debated by the full Senate this week.

If a more conservative court overturns national abortion law, individual states will decide whether to allow the procedure, and under what circumstances. To be ready for

that debate, some advocates, like Guttman, are pushing national organizations to focus more on the states.

The Jewish community always has taken a multi-faceted approach to building support for its social policy agenda. Especially in the past few years, with the community's progressive agenda items unwelcome in a Washington increasingly dominated by conservative values, the groups have had to try different things.

"The model is the Maccabees," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League. "They didn't win because they had superior weaponry or numbers; they won because they knew the terrain, used their moxie and picked their battles."

Some might say the model also has been President Bush. Unable to get his faith-based initiatives through Congress, he started enacting them through executive orders. That effort has been heavily opposed by many Jewish groups, except for Orthodox ones.

In addition to state policy work, liberal Jewish groups have continued to look for relief from state and federal courts, challenging the Bush administration's view of the separation of church and state. They have worked with federal agencies to get policies enacted through executive order, including allowing non-profit organizations to compete for earmarked funds from the Department of Homeland Security.

But state legislatures increasingly have become the new arena for social policy battles.

Jewish groups have been pushed to work

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

Social issues like abortion and euthanasia might be lobbied at the state level soon

Continued from page 1

at the state level because many of their opponents are trying to enact legislation there. Spurred by conservative Christian groups, many state legislatures in recent years have taken up issues such as restrictions on abortion and bans on same-sex marriage.

"State by state, we have a lot of laws in our legislatures that put a lot of obstacles in the way of women," said Marlene Hammerman, the National Council of Jewish Women's state public affairs chairwoman in Missouri. "We've had to fight it at the state level because the federal protections don't always protect us."

Now Jewish groups are looking to play offense as well, proposing legislation, with coalition partners, to have states fund stem cell research and restrict insurance companies from charging premiums or denying coverage to people who travel to Israel.

Expansion of federal hate-crime legislation has stalled in Congress since 1997. But the league and other groups have succeeded in getting state legislatures to enact hate crime statutes or expand protected categories to include sexual orientation, gender and disability.

"The fact that it hasn't gotten done at the federal level has certainly been an impetus for it to happen at the state level," Lieberman said.

Still, the resources devoted to state-level initiatives are small compared to the emphasis on national issues.

"We've gotten used to a model where

people fly to Washington," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism.

"We're not structured to know what is happening legislatively in Columbus," Ohio's state capital, Pelavin said. "We're in a better position than we were five years ago, but not as good a position as we need to be."

A pilot program, Reform Jewish Voice of New York State, is looking to mirror the center's success in Albany. In March, the group will have a Consultation on Conscience — the same name as the center's biennial conference — focusing on stem cell research and reproductive rights, among other issues.

"So many issues have devolved to the states," said Honey Heller, a member of the group's steering committee. "Everybody loves hands-on social action, but we're trying to educate our community that it's not enough; you have to be

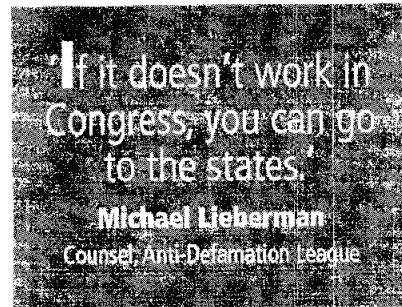
involved in advocacy."

The Orthodox Union hired a staffer last year to focus on state initiatives. While the Orthodox Union has been more successful than some other Jewish groups in Washington — because many of its social policy positions are more in line with those of conservative Christians — the organization felt the need to have someone working on the state level as well.

"Many more decisions that can impact our members happen on the state level," said Nathan Diament, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs. The union has focused on education, seeking tax credits for private-school tuition and government transportation services for day schools.

Jewish leaders say they'll have to use all avenues at their disposal.

"If it doesn't work in Congress, you can go to the states," Lieberman said, "and if it doesn't work there, you have the courts."



Memorial on Nazi meeting revamped

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — The fall of the former Soviet Union has helped launch a new exhibit at the site where the Nazis decided on the genocide of European Jewry.

Among the items on display at the Memorial and Educational Site of the Wannsee Conference is a memo from Secret Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich — written days after he chaired the 1942 Wannsee Conference — referring to the "total solution to the Jewish question" that he was charged to carry out. The memo was found in a Latvian archive, consulting historian Peter Klein said.

The KGB archive in Moscow also yielded information about the role in the genocide of police battalions and the Gestapo, memorial director Norbert Kampe said.

The overhaul is one of several major renovations in recent years that have changed the landscape of remembrance in Germany. The reopening marked the 64th anniversary of the notorious conference, and was one of several events around

Germany's Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jan. 27.

The updated Wannsee exhibit — it originally opened in 1992 — includes newly unearthed documents and consists of flexible elements that will be easy to update. The project cost some \$730,000, covered by the federal government and an educational lottery. Funds are still needed for an exhibit catalog, Kampe said.

For the inauguration of the revamped exhibit last week, several hundred guests gathered here, traipsing through fresh snow for a tour of the villa and a kosher reception.

Designed by architect Rainer Lendler, the exhibit consists mostly of panels hanging from ceiling-mounted metal tracks. Video installations and other media are included.

The exhibit covers racism and anti-Jewish ideology before and during the Third Reich; it traces the path to the industrialized mass murder of European Jewry; and it provides an in-depth examination of the Wannsee Conference, its participants and protocol.

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Politician rapped after call for shul's demolition

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — A well-known Polish politician's call for the demolition of the New Synagogue in the city of Poznan has drawn fierce criticism from Polish Jewish leaders, as well as an anti-racism group.

A leader of the 12-member Jewish community of Poznan, Alicja Kobus, described Marcin Libicki's statements as "shocking."

Another senior member of the community described Libicki as "our own Poznan anti-Semite who the people of Poznan do not agree with."

Libicki, a member of Poland's governing Law and Justice Party elected to the European Parliament, argues in the Jan. 12 Poznan edition of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper that building the synagogue was "an openly anti-Polish act" and part of "a plan of a Kulturkampf," or cultural struggle, "which provided for the cultural minimizing of expressions (also architectural expressions) of Polish and Catholic influences in the city."

Libicki's comments reflect a key criticism of Jews in contemporary Poland — that historically Polish Jews were traitors who betrayed Poland to the Prussians, and then to the Russians.

The synagogue was built in 1907 while Poznan was under Prussian rule, which was dedicated to eliminating all signs of Polish national aspirations.

Libicki, an art historian from Poznan, writes that the synagogue has no "aesthetic value," as the Nazis gutted it during their occupation of Poland, chopping off its once-spectacular dome and turning its interior into a swimming pool, a function the former house of worship still holds today.

Because it would be too costly to rebuild — Libicki estimates the price tag at \$3.2 million — and because of its unpleasant history, he writes that perhaps it would be better to demolish the synagogue and excavate beneath its foundations to expose the city's ancient walls, which could serve as a tourist attraction.

Public perceptions of Libicki may be hard to gauge, although Piotr Boyarski, a political reporter for *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poznan, said he has a solid base of "traditional Catholic voters."

However, many of his supporters "are not likely to agree with his ideas about the synagogue," he added.

The future of the synagogue has long been a subject of debate in Poznan, with an American living in Poznan, Andrew Hingston, calling for a competition including Polish Jews and non-Jews to plan for its future.

The local Jewish community, in cooperation with the

Poznan City

Council and the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, is seeking to transform the synagogue into a cultural and educational center for ethnic and religious tolerance, explained Piotr Kadlick, the union's chairman.

So far, however, they have not been successful in finding a private donor to fund the project.

Libicki is well known for what some observers call eccentric and nationalistic views, but it's his current political prominence as a representative of Poland in a European legislative body that annoys human rights supporters. Marcin Kornak of Never Again, a Polish anti-racism group and magazine, said, "The extremist activities of Marcin Libicki belong to the lunatic fringe and yet he is an influential member of the ruling party."

Never Again points out that Libicki has a history of anti-Jewish stances, such as his opposition to property restitution to former Jewish owners. Until recently, he was a member of the National Right Party, an official sister party of Jean-Marie Le Pen's xenophobic National Front in France.

The Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University calls the party "a radical anti-Semitic and racist organization."

In November, Libicki unsuccessfully tried to get the Poznan public prosecutor to instigate charges against the Simon Wiesenthal Center for slandering the Polish state by stating on its Web site that anti-Semitism existed in Poland.

Libicki claims that the site misleads readers to believe that the 3 million Polish Jews killed by the Nazis were killed by Poles because of the way in which the anti-Semitism reference was placed.

In 2001, Libicki also advocated the release from custody of Henryk Mania while he was on trial for being a guard at the Chelmno death camp. Libicki said a man of Mania's

advanced age should not have to suffer in prison before a verdict was reached.

In a phone interview, Libicki told JTA, "I have no problems with Jews. They have made significant cultural achievements, as poets, for example. It's all a misunderstanding," he said, referring to accusations that he was anti-Semitic.

He added that he was a staunch supporter of the State of Israel. Further, he suggested that his stance on the synagogue is actually pro-Jewish.

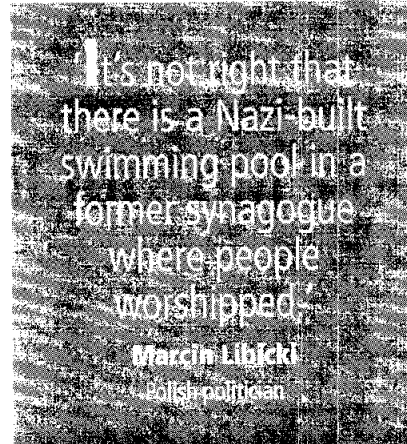
"It's not right that there is a Nazi-built swimming pool in a former synagogue where people worshipped. It's not for me to decide what will be done of course, but I think the city should buy the building back from the Poznan Jewish community and then build a new synagogue at a site where a medieval synagogue once stood," he said, expressing an opinion that Jewish officials in the country find absurd.

There were approximately 40,000 Jews in the region when the synagogue was built, about 3 percent of the population. Most left before World War II, the remaining 1,500 Jews nearly all died in concentration camps.

The city council has repudiated Libicki's proposal and so has Poznan's archbishop, Stanislaw Gadecki, president of the Polish Episcopal Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue.

"I am treating his proposal as a piece of humor and I know the authorities see it the same way. No one takes him seriously."

But he admitted that "Libicki gets attention" with his proposals.



BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Nazi case goes to court

A case involving Nazi art is now in the U.S. court system.

The Detroit Institute of Arts and the Toledo Museum of Art asked a U.S. court to declare them the rightful owners of one painting each after a report commissioned by the museums showed that they obtained the paintings fairly.

The museums took the case to court after the heirs of Martha Nathan refused to drop their claims to the paintings: Vincent Van Gogh's "The Diggers" is in the DIA's collection, while Paul Gauguin's "Street in Tahiti" is owned by the Toledo museum.

The heirs could not be reached for comment.

Town gets Sabbath boundary

A New Jersey town approved a Sabbath boundary.

Tuesday evening's vote by the Borough Council of Tenafly, N.J., ends a long controversy over whether the eruv was a lawful religious accommodation or whether it gave preferential treatment to observant Judaism.

An eruv permits observant Jews to carry some items and push carriages and wheelchairs on the Sabbath.

ACLU sues government on Muslim scholar

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government for preventing a controversial Muslim scholar from entering the country.

The lawsuit seeks to pave the way for Tariq Ramadan to enter the United States to accept speaking invitations.

In December 2004, Ramadan, who is Swiss, gave up his appointment at Notre Dame after the State Department revoked his visa. Some consider him an apologist for radical Islam.

Ramadan has spoken out against anti-Semitism, though he angered many Jews by saying that French Jewish intellectuals' religious and ethnic identity prevent them from adhering to universal values.

Cosmetics donated to Katrina victims

Estee Lauder Companies recently donated an estimated \$100,000 worth of cosmetics to a community devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The products went to members of Congregation Beth Israel in Biloxi, Miss., and other Jewish and non-Jewish members of the community, following an appeal for gifts.

WORLD

Ukrainian officials blast university

Ukrainian government officials condemned the anti-Semitic activities of the country's largest private university.

On Monday, Boris Tarasyuk, Ukraine's foreign minister condemned on national TV the activities at the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, or MAUP.

"I think that all positive forces in Ukraine must evaluate the activities of MAUP. There is no place for anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Ukraine," Tarasyuk said on air.

In a news release, Ukraine's Ministry of Education asked Ukrainian law enforcement bodies to analyze the extent to which the academy's actions can be prosecuted or punished.

North American Jewish leaders praised the actions.

The academy has been responsible for a slew of anti-Semitic publications, and university officials recently released a statement asking the United Nations to shut down the State of Israel.

"It's definitely an important step in the right direction," said Mark Levin, the executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf

of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia, "and we hope that a full investigation by the appropriate ministries and law enforcement agencies will put a stop to MAUP's hatred."

German neo-Nazis' passports may be frozen

A German official proposed that the passports of suspected neo-Nazis be frozen so they cannot attend a Holocaust conference in Iran.

"It would massively damage Germany's image if German citizens" took part in Iran to deny the Holocaust or the right of Israel to exist, Gunther Beckstein, Bavaria's interior minister, said Tuesday.

The proposed conference is seen as an opportunity for Iran to showcase Holocaust deniers.

Charges in French cemetery desecration

Two men were indicted for allegedly desecrating a Jewish cemetery in eastern France in April 2004.

They were charged last Friday with desecration, damaging a cemetery, abusing public services, praising war crimes and incitement to racism, District Attorney Pascal Schultz told the AFP news service.

The two men, aged 36 and 27, scrawled anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi phrases and symbols on 127 graves in Herrlisheim.

One of the men allegedly has connections to the neo-Nazi movement.

Authorities are convinced that at least four people were involved in the desecration, and one other man was found guilty in December 2004 of taking part.

Lionel Lezeau, 24, was a member of the far-right National Front, though the party suspended him after his indictment.

Lezeau has denied involvement and was released after four months of detention.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli party loses leader

Yosef "Tommy" Lapid resigned from his Shinui Party.

Lapid, a Holocaust survivor whose party rode a wave of anti-religious sentiment to become the Knesset's third-largest faction after the 2003 election, said Wednesday that voter support was at a low.

He blamed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's formation of the centrist Kadima Party last year, which drew many Shinui supporters.

"I take responsibility for the party's collapse, but I do not feel guilt. Sharon, with Kadima, entered right into Shinui's niche," Lapid told reporters.

"In its current configuration, Shinui does not deserve the public trust. A chapter in my life, a chapter I am proud of, is over and done with," he said.

Opinion polls suggest Shinui may not win enough votes in the March 28 election to take even a single Knesset seat.

Push for baseball in Israel

Baseball fans are pushing to build the sport in Israel.

The plan launched this week by the Israel Baseball League includes the building of community baseball fields throughout Israel, recruiting American Jews to play on the 2008 Israeli Women's Softball Olympics team and the establishment of a summer baseball camp that will open this July in Israel.

The association hopes to eventually form a professional league in Israel.

The Jewish National Fund is helping the IBL obtain land for baseball fields.

More information is available at www.israelbaseballleague.com.