

**IN THE NEWS**
**Group talks Hamas with Russian official**

American Jewish Committee officials raised concerns with Russia's foreign minister about the country's relationship with Iran and Hamas.

In a meeting in New York on Tuesday, Sergei Lavrov told the Jewish leaders that his country has no intention of Iran becoming a nuclear state, and that it does not have a plan to allow Iran to use a small amount of uranium for enrichment purposes, according to the executive director of the AJCommittee, David Harris.

Lavrov also defended Russia's decision to meet with Hamas leaders last week.

"We expressed our concerns about how this might be viewed by Hamas," Harris said of allowing Hamas leaders to meet with Russian officials.

**U.S. report cites Israel, P.A. on rights**

Israel and the Palestinian Authority are both cited for "problems" in the U.S. State Department's 2005 report on human rights.

The State Department ended its practice in the latest report of including a summary sentence in each country report that said whether human rights had improved or deteriorated. Instead, it lists "problems" for each country.

**Soviet-era bill passes another hurdle**

The U.S. House of Representatives approved a measure that would graduate Ukraine from the Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions.

The House voted Wednesday to lift sanctions on Ukraine, which were imposed in 1974 because of the Soviet Union's emigration and human rights policies for Jews. The measure passed 417-2 Wednesday, after passing the Senate last November. Several Jewish groups, including NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia, pressed for Ukraine's graduation.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Some Conservative Jews upset after decision is delayed on gays

By CHANAN TIGAY

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — The Conservative movement's decision to delay a vote on its approach to homosexuality is angering members who want leaders to liberalize the movement's stance on gays and lesbians.

"It's yet another disappointment," said Rabbi Ayelet Cohen, associate rabbi at New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, a synagogue for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Jews. "It feels like yet another missed opportunity for the law committee to take position of moral leadership."

During a two-day meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which ended Wednesday, authors of four rabbinic opinions on the status of homosexuality in the movement — two on each side of the issue — were asked to make revisions to their opinions ahead of a vote on the issue in December.

The decision reaffirms the status quo, at least for the time being, and means that the movement's 1992 decision barring openly gay individuals from its rabbinical schools and forbidding its rabbis to perform same-sex marriages will remain in place.

The movement has repeatedly affirmed that it welcomes gay and lesbian individuals in its congregations.

The debate during the past three years on amending the 1992 policy has highlighted some of the difficulties Conservative Jewry faces in its approach to religious law.

Since its inception, the stream — once America's dominant religious movement, recently surpassed by Reform Judaism

— has walked a fine line between adhering to halachah, or Jewish law, and embracing a modern approach to religious observance. Its legal scholars in some instances have hewed strictly to traditional interpretations of the legal code, and in others have adapted it.

It remains to be seen how the homosexuality issue will be resolved.

"The pain that so many real people are experiencing because of their love for tradition and their hope for a supportive community clearly hasn't moved the Rabbinical Assembly as an institution to move more quickly," said Rabbi Menachem Creditor, one of the founders of Keshet Rabbis, a group supporting gay rights in the movement.

But even for some supporters of a new approach, the outcome wasn't all negative.

"I understand that it's frustrating, and there's a piece of me that feels frustrated as well," said Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector of Los Angeles' University of Judaism and a co-author of one of the teshuvot, or responsa, recommending a more liberal approach to homosexuality. "But in the end, I would rather have well-honed and clearly articulated positions that people can study and understand than positions that are not well-argued."

"The law committee set a deadline for this," he said, referring to the announced December vote. "It's not as if we're delaying this forever. This is not ducking responsibility."

In a meeting last April, the law committee met but took no action on the 1992 decision. Pro-gay advocates had hoped that the body would find fit to make a change this time around.

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**FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES**

## ■ A movement struggles to define its approach to gays and lesbians

*Continued from page 1*

In the aftermath of the meeting, Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the assembly, urged his colleagues to be patient.

"It was an intense yet respectful meeting in which we looked at many dimensions of the issue," he said. "I am urging my colleagues who promote change to realize that there are an equal number of colleagues who are in favor of welcoming gays and lesbians in the Conservative community but who do not wish to change halachah."

In 1992, the Rabbinical Assembly voted against ordaining gay rabbis and officiating at same-sex weddings. Declared gays and lesbians are officially barred from the Conservative movement's two main rabbinical seminaries, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

The assembly did declare that congregations should welcome gays and lesbians, but has let individual congregations decide whether or not gays may be hired as teachers or youth leaders.

Discussion on the papers reaffirming the 1992 opinion focused around what the

status quo means: Would the committee change the tone, if not the substance, of the movement's approach to homosexuality? If so, how?

The first of the two papers advocating change interprets the biblical verse forbidding homosexuality — "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman: it is an abomination" — as a prohibition on anal sex between men that could be read as allowing for other forms of homosexual congress.

The other pro-change paper suggested removing the prohibition in

the biblical verse altogether, on grounds that it's unjust. It is this opinion that could require a takanah.

Dorff said he thought the committee was split on the need for change.

"I think we're not unanimous, to put

it mildly," he said. "Roughly half of us are interested in making some change, and half are not interested in making a change. I think that reflects the movement and reflects America generally. This is the moral issue of our time."

A group of Conservative rabbis, meanwhile, was mobilizing to respond to news of the committee's decision to delay a vote.

"How long will the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and the leadership of our movement delay in speaking up for the treatment of gay and lesbian people as equal human beings within our communities and institutions?" the group said in a statement e-mailed to JTA.

Meyers said that in a movement as diverse as Conservative Judaism, it's not surprising to find disagreement on this issue.

"It's a rough moment for Conservative Judaism," he said. "It's the kind of issue that confronts us in which I don't believe there will be contentment on any side of this debate when the law committee finishes its deliberations."

**'It's a rough moment for Conservative Judaism. It's the kind of issue that confronts us in which I don't believe there will be contentment on any side of this debate.'**

**Joel Meyers**  
Conservative movement official

## Israel and Spain celebrate in D.C.

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Israeli and Spanish ambassadors to the United States celebrated 20 years of diplomatic relations.

B'nai B'rith International hosted Wednesday's event at the historic Sixth and I Synagogue in Washington, featuring Ladino music and Sephardi food.

Daniel Ayalon, Israel's ambassador to

the United States, said Spain had become an ally in the 20 years since the two countries exchanged ambassadors. "Spain is a very committed partner," Ayalon told his Spanish counterpart, Carlos Westendorp.

Westendorp apologized for the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, which he called Spain's "greatest mistake."

## Mubarak woos Israeli tourists

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Egypt's president reportedly called on Israeli tourists avoiding his country to reconsider their plans.

Yediot Achronot quoted a letter sent recently by Hosni Mubarak to Israel's Foreign Ministry, in which he pledged that security at Sinai resorts was satisfactory.

"The Israelis have nothing to worry about," Mubarak wrote, according to Wednesday's report. "We want to promote tourism and are doing everything to protect tourists."

Israelis, who long flocked to Sinai, largely have avoided it since a series of Islamist

suicide bombings killed dozens of vacationers there in 2004.

In the past few years, Israel repeatedly has issued advisories against its citizens visiting neighboring Arab countries.

Some Israelis believe they're not truly welcome in Egypt, despite the 27-year-old peace accord between the countries.

Yediot quoted Mubarak as adding in his letter, "We will never return to the path of war. This is our strategic decision, and we will keep with it."

The Foreign Ministry did not immediately confirm the report.

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# Immigration reform draws increased attention

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Despite widespread support in the Jewish community for comprehensive immigration reform, concern is mounting over legislation that doesn't provide illegal immigrants with avenues to citizenship.

Numerous Jewish groups say current reform efforts in Congress focus too much on punitive measures for illegal immigrants rather than helping them find a way forward.

The renewed push comes as one of the community's premier agencies on immigration issues, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, gets new leadership. Gideon Aronoff, who has been HIAS' government relations director, was named Monday as the group's new president and CEO.

Referring to legislation currently under consideration in the U.S. Senate, Aronoff said, "There is clearly an enforcement-only, limited approach that is unrealistic in its ability to address the issue of the undocumented that are already here and the need for legal paths for immigrant workers to gain citizenship."

Given Jews' minority status around the world as well as their history in this country, Jewish groups often have supported

immigrant rights in the United States. In recent years, however, that interest has clashed with concern that open immigration policies could allow terrorists to enter the country.

Immigration advocates in the Jewish community say the goal should be to push for reform that marshals resources in the right direction.

Immigration advocates are concerned about a bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives last year, championed by Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.). The bill focused almost exclusively on immigration enforcement, rather than reducing backlogs and producing paths to citizenship, key goals in the Jewish community.

Several bills are being considered in the Senate Judiciary Committee — all of which have aspects that are better than Sensenbrenner's package, Jewish leaders said — but only one will move through the Senate and be reconciled with the House version in a conference committee.

It's unclear whether any bill that moves through the Senate will be to Jewish

groups' liking. Indeed, many officials hope no legislation receives final approval this year so as not to risk forwarding a bad bill.

A broad coalition of Jewish groups sent a letter to lawmakers late last month seeking comprehensive immigration reform. The request seeks border-protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values, paths toward legal permanent residency and citizenship for hard-working immigrants and ways to ease the hardship of separated families.

The letter was signed by leaders of all streams of Judaism, as well as HIAS, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the National Council of Jewish Women, the United Jewish

Communities and the Workmen's Circle. Numerous local Jewish organizations also signed on.

"I think that if you look at the array of Jewish communities that are involved in immigration issues, you see a very solid mix of social action, tikkun olam reasons and the practical, security-building coalition reasons," Aronoff said.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

Many officials hope no legislation receives final approval this year so as not to risk forwarding a bad bill.

# London's Jews waver as mayor's sentence is suspended

By VANESSA BULKACZ

LONDON (JTA) — London's Jewish community is beginning to waver in the matter of the city's mayor, whose remarks to a Jewish reporter comparing him to a Nazi were punished with a sentence which was suspended just before it was to start.

Ken Livingstone was to begin a four-week paid suspension from office March 1 for his remarks to a Jewish newspaper reporter, Oliver Finegold, whom he compared to a Nazi concentration camp guard. The day before the mayor's suspension was to start, he successfully lobbied the High Court to have the sanction stayed, pending appeal.

Referring to the appointed, three-member Adjudication Panel for England that handed down his sentence, Livingstone said, "Three members of a body that no one has ever elected should not be allowed to overturn the votes of millions of Londoners."

Due to the mayor's outspoken criticism, public attention has shifted away from his remarks to the system itself.

Despite their earlier pleas for an apology from the mayor, a poll last week showed that 84 percent of London Assembly members did not support the sentence.

Sir Anthony Holland, chairman of the Standards Board for England, has said the system "does have flaws."

With the twists and turns in the Livingstone case getting harder to follow, the Jewish community's reaction is becoming mixed.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is one entity that has not wavered. In December, the board filed a complaint against the mayor, with whom they have clashed in the past over his open criticism of Israel. Livingstone says that the board lodged the complaint solely because of his views on the Israeli government.

After the verdict was announced, the board labeled Livingstone "the architect of his own misfortune," and continued to defend its original complaint, despite mounting criticism.

Leslie Bunder, editor of the SomethingJewish.co.uk Web site, wrote, "There are certainly far more important issues the Board should get involved in rather than the off-the-cuff comment Ken made."

The Association of Jewish Refugees, which last year dubbed the mayor's remarks "flippant and disgraceful," told JTA this week that it's declining to comment further on the increasingly muddled debate.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### WORLD

#### U.N. expert: Revamp 'road map'

The U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan is "hopelessly out of date," a United Nations official said.

In a 22-page report issued in the lead-up to the annual U.N. Human Rights Commission next week, John Dugard, a South African professor who is harshly critical of Israel, also claimed Jewish settlers "terrorize" Palestinians in the West Bank and that Israel still dominates life in Gaza because it continues targeted killings of Palestinian terrorists, according to media reports.

"There is a need for a new road map which takes account of present political realities and is anchored in respect for human rights and the rule of law in the resolution of the conflict," Dugard was reported as saying to Reuters.

Israel in the past has rejected Dugard's reports as one-sided, and Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Itzhak Levanon, called his latest claims "misinformed and inaccurate."

The report was filed before Hamas swept Palestinian Authority legislative elections in January and does not mention the group or Palestinian violence, reports say.

#### Hungary reopens compensation program

Hungary reopened a Holocaust compensation program.

Survivors and victims' relatives of the Holocaust from Hungary have until July 31 to apply for the program, which pays \$1,800 for each parent, spouse, children or sibling killed.

The reopening of the program, which was launched with lower payment amounts in 1997, came after pressure from the Claims Conference and the World Jewish Restitution Organization.

More information is available at [www.claimscon.org](http://www.claimscon.org).

#### Dershowitz vows to defend soldiers

Alan Dershowitz pledged to defend in court any Israeli army officers sued while traveling outside of the country.

"Israeli military and political figures should have no fear of walking free and proud in any democratic nation, nor should they fear justice," Dershowitz said Monday night in Brussels, according to the European Jewish Press.

The Harvard law professor was in Brussels for his "Tour for Democracy" in Europe aimed at responding to Israel's critics.

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Israeli leaders threatened

The Palestinian terrorist group Islamic Jihad threatened the lives of Israeli leaders.

"Leaders of the enemy should know that they personally are targets," Islamic Jihad said in a statement Wednesday, without elaborating. The threat came in response to an Israeli airstrike in the Gaza Strip on Monday that killed two senior leaders of the group.

Top civil servants in Israel have been heavily protected since Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi was assassinated by Palestinians in 2001.

#### Abbas backs Olmert

Mahmoud Abbas backed Ehud Olmert's bid for the Israeli premiership.

"We respect the free will of the Israelis. I hope that Olmert wins," the Palestinian Authority president told Italy's *Corriere della Sera* newspaper in an interview published Wednesday. "I know him well, and I believe that I could work with him in a productive way."

Abbas also praised Shimon Peres, who is expected to get a senior

Cabinet post if the Kadima Party, led by Olmert, wins March 28 elections in Israel.

Officials from the rival Labor and Likud parties voiced anger over Abbas' endorsement of Olmert.

In previous Israeli elections, the Palestinians avoided openly commenting on the candidates. Hours after the interview's publication, Abbas aides issued a statement saying he had been misquoted.

#### Audit blasts Gaza pullout

Israel's state comptroller censured the government for its handling of settlers evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

In a report released Wednesday, Micha Lindenstrauss criticized the Prime Minister's Office, the Finance Ministry and the government-run Disengagement Authority for foot-dragging on efforts to relocate and compensate some 8,000 settlers removed from Gaza last summer.

According to the audit, 250 evacuee families still live in temporary housing.

Government officials responded by vowing to find satisfactory arrangements by the spring for all former settlers, and noted that the relocation was hindered by the refusal of many settlers to go along with the withdrawal.

#### Jewish anti-Zionists visit Iran

A delegation from a Jewish anti-Zionist group is visiting Iran. The group representing Neturei Karta is visiting the Islamic republic in a show of support for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his calls to eliminate Israel, the Jerusalem Post reported. In a statement to Iran's state-run radio, the group called for "the disintegration of the Zionist regime," the Post reported. A fervently Orthodox group of a few hundred people, the Neturei Karta has drawn attention by regularly siding with anti-Zionist movements.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### War criminal's citizenship revocation upheld

A U.S. appeals court upheld a ruling revoking the citizenship of a man for his service in Nazi camps during World War II.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit affirmed the ruling against John Hansl.

During the war, Hansl, 81, served as an armed guard at Sachsenhausen and Natzweiler, where thousands of prisoners died.

The case against Hansl was brought in part by the Office of Special Investigations, the U.S. government's Nazi-hunting unit.

#### Leading philanthropist dies at 68

Martin Stein, a leading Jewish philanthropist, died of leukemia in Milwaukee on March 2 at the age of 68.

Stein headed the United Jewish Appeal, one of the organizations that later formed the United Jewish Communities, in the mid-1980s.

"He left an indelible mark on everyone who was privileged to know him," the chairman of the United Jewish Communities, Robert Goldberg, said in a statement. Stein was also known for his work on behalf of Soviet Jewry and his support of the airlifts of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1984 and 1991.

#### Arson damages Holocaust project

Arson damaged the offices of a Holocaust history project in San Antonio. Monday's fire caused extensive damage to the offices of the Holocaust History Project, which works to confront Holocaust denial.

"Although the fire caused significant damage to our offices, there is no way we will be silenced," said Harry Mazal, the project's director.