

IN THE NEWS
Rights body condemns campus anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism on college campuses is a "serious problem" that merits a campaign to inform Jewish students of their rights, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights said.

The commission cited anti-Israel propaganda on campus that exploits long-time stereotypes.

It recommended that the Education Department run a campaign to inform Jewish students of their right to be free of harassment and that it collect data on anti-Semitic and other hate crimes at universities.

The commission also concluded that there is "substantial evidence" that some university departments of Middle East studies "may repress legitimate debate concerning Israel."

Iran to accept nuclear inspectors

Nuclear inspectors will tour Iranian sites.

Iran suspended inspections done with little warning last month after the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, referred its suspicions that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon to the U.N. Security Council for possible sanctions.

However, Iran will maintain its commitment to the inspections schedule imposed by its adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The next such inspection is Friday.

Bush backs prayer for Darfur

President Bush encouraged those observing a week of prayer and action aimed at stopping the violence in Darfur.

The week of prayer was organized by the Save Darfur Coalition, a coalition made up of 100 faith-based, humanitarian and human rights organizations, several of them Jewish.

The coalition is promoting a campaign urging Bush to support an international presence in Sudan.

WORLD REPORT

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New Orleans Jewish benefit concert brings funds, music to Katrina victims

By LARRY LUXNER

NEW ORLEANS (JTA)—Think of New Orleans music and you don't usually think of Hebrew or Yiddish song.

But Hebrew, Yiddish and English tunes filled the ears of nearly 1,000 music lovers last weekend as a variety of acts — ranging from New York pop singer Gershon Veroba to Moldovan crooner Efim Chorny — converged on New Orleans for a two-day benefit concert.

Organizers said the New Orleans International Jewish Music Festival was expected to raise at least \$75,000 for local Jewish institutions shattered by Hurricane Katrina last year. That includes \$50,000 in donations already collected from private individuals and institutions, and another \$25,000 from the sale of tickets, CDs, T-shirts and other souvenirs.

But this was more than just a fund-raiser: The gathering also brought badly needed joy to a city that has seen mostly suffering in the seven months since Katrina's deadly visit.

"Music is a very powerful thing," singer Neshama Carlebach said. "Being in New Orleans has been heavy for me; it's very difficult seeing all this destruction first-hand. So I hope I can bring some healing."

A city famous for jazz, blues, Bourbon Street and Mardi Gras certainly could use a little of Carlebach's healing.

Fewer than 200,000 of New Orleans' approximately 500,000 residents have returned since the storm. The Jewish community has fared a little better: About 60 percent of the Big Easy's pre-hurricane Jewish population of 9,500 has returned.

"The idea was to bring Jewish music back

to New Orleans," sculptor Gary Rosenthal said. "You can talk about how important it is to get jobs and rebuild bricks and mortar. But I'm an artist and I focus on spirit and on making Jewish children happy."

Billed as a sort of Jewish Woodstock, the event kicked off Saturday night at the Howlin' Wolf, a club in New Orleans' Warehouse district, then continued Sunday afternoon at a half-filled auditorium on the Tulane University campus.

Organizers had hoped to attract more people, but they were forced to compete with the NCAA basketball Final Four, in which nearby Louisiana State University was a semi-finalist, as well as other Jewish and secular events taking place around town.

Still, those who showed up weren't disappointed.

"My grandfather saw an ad in Moment magazine and told me about this," said Tulane student Zack Rothbart, 19. "I think it's great all these musicians were able to put on such a concert."

Faye and Chip Merritt drove four hours from Pensacola, Fla., to attend the Sunday show.

"All the entertainers performed very well," Faye Merritt said. "The diversity of the Jewish music was great. I really enjoyed the Yiddish stuff, because my mother was from Poland."

Some of the most popular acts included West Coast musicians Fran Avni, Sam Glaser and RebbeSoul, as well as Nashville singer Stacy Beyer and New York's Voices for Israel and Blue Fringe.

Also well-received was Veroba, who adapts

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**ARTS
&
CULTURE**

Performers at the New Orleans benefit included Neshama Carlebach and Rebbesoul

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Jewish lyrics to such 1970s standards as Earth Wind & Fire's "September" and Chicago's "Saturday in the Park."

"Most of us Jewish musicians are just getting by," Veroba told JTA, "so it's amazing that so many of them gave up gigs to come here and play for free."

The event was put together in just three months by Rosenthal, of Kensington, Md., and his friend Michael Monheit, the Washington-based publisher of Moment.

Rosenthal said he came up with the idea after one of his New Orleans clients, French Quarter gallery owner Dashka Roth, lost her home in Katrina.

Moved to help, Rosenthal arranged for his Hiddur Mitzvah Project to create close to 1,000 menorahs and dreidels. Some \$40,000 worth of these objects were donated to the Jewish community of New Orleans at a Chanukah party.

"We have fed people in Argentina and sent rabbis to Uganda, but this was the first time I've done anything where I actually know the people being helped," he said.

Rosenthal didn't want to stop there. That's when he contacted Monheit at Moment.

"I told him I'd like to have a concert in New Orleans, a free concert at the JCC. He said, 'Instead of one or two artists, let's have a festival.' He said, 'Gary, why don't you make a Jewish Mardi Gras? If you're gonna do it, let's do it right.'"

Monheit began contacting the 19 acts on the CD, and 13 of them immediately said they'd play in a festival.

"I agreed to fly them all in," Monheit said. "It's a way for the musicians to contribute to the city of New Orleans, and at the same time for me to do something I've always dreamed of doing, having a Jewish music festival. Because of the hurricane, New Orleans became the perfect venue for this."

According to Monheit, the event was produced for \$50,000, but only because the artists donated their time. He hopes to make it an annual event.

While local bands such as the New Orleans All-Star Klezmer Band were paid for their time, out-of-town performers were not. The idea was to help local musicians,

many of whom also have lost their homes and possessions.

That's also why admissions were kept artificially low; Saturday night's show was only \$15 and Sunday afternoon's performance \$10. Students were given \$5 discounts.

Avni, who's been singing in Hebrew and English for close to 30 years, said she

didn't have to think twice about performing for free in New Orleans.

"Having a music festival with people who aren't getting paid, but donating their efforts, is very special," she said. "We rarely get a chance to do something like this." ■

'It's amazing that so many of them gave up gigs to come here and play for free.'

Gershon Veroba
New York pop singer

Whither Israel's Chief Rabbinate?

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With scandal threatening the tenure of one of the top rabbis, some Israelis are asking whether Israel's Chief Rabbinate is needed.

In a move unprecedented in the Jewish state, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz issued a public call Monday for the Ashkenazi chief rabbi, Yona Metzger, to resign.

Mazuz, an anti-corruption crusader, cited suggestions that Metzger illicitly accepted discounted rates for himself and his family at a luxury Jerusalem hotel during High Holidays in 2003 and 2004. He is also accused of staying at hotels at the taxpayers' expense despite having been provided with an apartment by the state.

"It would be appropriate if Rabbi Metzger took personal responsibility and decided on his own to step down," the Justice Ministry said in a six-page statement.

Metzger, 52, denied wrongdoing and vowed to petition the High Court of Justice against Mazuz.

"The attorney general has sentenced me without giving me a chance to defend myself," Channel 2 television quoted Metzger as saying.

A police probe against Metzger did not come up with enough evidence for formal charges.

There is already plenty of irritation with the Chief Rabbinate, a government-backed institution that many believe has

little relevance.

After the secular Shinui Party had the Religious Affairs Ministry dismantled under Israel's previous government, many now wonder if the Chief Rabbinate should be next.

"The rabbinate is entirely superfluous," said Nitzan Chen, religion reporter for Channel 1 television. "The post has no impact in terms of Jewish law or spiritual authority."

Metzger's Sephardi counterpart, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, has already lost much of the public's trust. His son was jailed in January for kidnapping and assaulting his sister's suitor. Amar himself was not charged in the case, but the apparent involvement of his wife, and the fact that the attack took place in the rabbi's home, are widely remembered.

Mazuz has said that if Metzger does not resign of his own accord, the Justice Ministry will act to have him removed.

With prosecution not an option, the attorney general could convene the Committee for Selecting Religious Judges — to which Metzger is subject — and demand they revoke his credentials.

"Even if Rabbi Metzger's conduct is not daubed in the black of criminal law, it is gray and dark gray, the realm of administrative procedures, civic ethics and disciplinary measures," legal expert Suzy Navot said. ■



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Bush appoints new, young Jewish liaison

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jay Zeidman spent a lot of his youth at meetings for Jewish organizations in Texas. Now, he's going as a representative of the White House.

Zeidman, 22, was named White House liaison to the Jewish community last month, and has been tasked with selling Bush administration policies to Jews at a time when the president's approval ratings are at historic lows.

Zeidman is the son of Fred Zeidman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and a fund-raiser for President Bush in the Jewish community. The younger Zeidman said he attended a lot of meetings with his father for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Anti-Defamation League in Houston, and walked away with strong support for Israel and political activism.

"I've found the community to be quite receptive to our agenda, both domestic and foreign," he said. "They are willing to listen."

Zeidman replaces Jeffrey Berkowitz, an associate director of scheduling at the White House, who tried to balance both tasks for a year. Zeidman is a staffer at the White House Office of Public Liaison, and officials said he will have more time to devote to working with Jewish leaders, considered a full-time job in itself.

Zeidman is the fifth liaison to the Jewish community since Bush came to office in 2001.

In his first month on the job, Zeidman was tasked with coordinating Vice President Dick Cheney's speech at the AIPAC Policy Conference. Now he is working on President Bush's expected address to the American Jewish Committee on May 4.

Zeidman said he was impressed with the administration's willingness to reach out to Jews.

"We're speaking on all levels, from the president and vice president on down," he said. "The president gets our message. He believes in the things we believe in."

Zeidman came to the White House from Texas Christian University near Dallas, where he graduated last year with a degree in economics and was student body president. He said the school was an "unlikely place" for a Jewish student to thrive.

"He's proud of his religion, proud of his heritage and was willing to withstand whatever peer pressure there might be to assimilate in the student community," his father said. "He stood up for what was right."

Zeidman began interning at the public liaison office over the summer, working with former Jewish liaisons Tevi Troy and Noam

Neusner.

"He's got an excellent temperament and judgment, which will really stand out," Neusner said. "He stays involved and is educated on the issues and he understands what people need to know and when they need to know it."

Zeidman said he wants to highlight the efforts the Bush administration is making to end the killing in Darfur, which has become an important topic for Jewish groups.

"There have been a lot of discussion that the administration has not taken enough action," he said. "Bottom line, that is not accurate."

He said that Bush continues to refer to Darfur as a genocide and that the word should resonate in the Jewish community.

Zeidman also has been issuing more e-mails and updates to a "Jewish leaders" list the White House maintains, on issues from the Palestinian and Israeli elections to the war in Iraq and Darfur.

"It's my job to get out there and make sure that the president and vice president and everyone else is speaking to the right groups and communicating the message, and gauge the feedback," he said.

Zeidman knows he's younger than most

staffers, but said his bosses have placed a lot of confidence in him.

"I'm confident I've seen what I need to see to take the next step and to really work hands-on with our community," he said.

Neusner said Zeidman immediately impressed people at the White House, adding that his understanding of the nuances of the Jewish community is beyond his years.

"Jay is rightfully judged on his skill and not on his age," he said. "This White House values people who show a capacity for organization, judgment, skill — and he's got all those things."

Zeidman's father has started referring to himself as the "elder Zeidman" when speaking with Jewish leaders. He says his son is not just following in his footsteps, but "is running right by me."

"How can I be more proud than I am of my son and the job he has taken on?" Fred Zeidman said.

Both father and son acknowledge that some may try to depict the appointment as an act of nepotism. But Fred Zeidman said that after he introduced his son at the White House, he was on his own.

"He didn't pick up the phone and ask anyone to get me this job," Jay Zeidman said of his father. "I know I got this on my own."

Jay Zeidman said he does not think about political office in his future. He hopes to return to Texas to get an MBA and go into business with his family.

"The days get long, the work gets tough," he said. "You get here very early, you stay very late, but you're working on something you believe in."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Zeidman graduated last year from Texas Christian University.

Arab Americans slam Dems

NEW YORK (JTA) — Arab American groups criticized Sen. Charles Schumer for allegedly denigrating Arabs. Schumer (D-N.Y.), who is Jewish, was quoted last week in the New York Observer as defending his opposition to a now-scuttled deal that would have allowed a Dubai company to manage six U.S. ports. "Let's say skinheads had bought a company to take over our port. I

think the outcry would have been the same," Schumer said. The Arab American Institute described Schumer's remarks as deplorable. "Sen. Schumer's brazen remark runs contrary to the Democratic Party's principles of inclusion and diversity," it said in a statement. "The senator owes Arab Americans an apology." Schumer's office did not respond to JTA calls for comment.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon surgery postponed indefinitely

An operation to repair surgical damage to Ariel Sharon's skull was postponed.

Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital announced Tuesday that the 78-year-old prime minister, who has been comatose since a Jan. 4 stroke, was suffering from a mild respiratory infection and a planned operation had been deferred indefinitely.

With Ehud Olmert, winner of last week's Israeli elections, about to be sworn in as prime minister, media reports said Sharon likely would be declared "permanently incapacitated" next week.

Peretz to become defense minister?

Labor Party leader Amir Peretz wants to be Israel's next defense minister.

Peretz made the demand this week in coalition talks with interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, political sources said Tuesday. According to the sources, Peretz's first choice was the Treasury, but this was refused by Olmert, whose Kadima Party won last week's national elections.

Olmert is considered more likely to give up the defense portfolio as he is not close to its current holder, Shaul Mofaz.

Peretz lacks a military pedigree, but a stint in the Defense Ministry could help establish his security credentials for a future bid for top office.

If he gets the post, Peretz is expected to bring in Ami Ayalon, a former Navy and Shin Bet chief now in the Labor Party, as his deputy minister.

Hamas leader talks tough

The Palestinian Authority's foreign minister called for Israel's elimination and said Hamas would not disarm.

"I dream of putting up a giant map of the world on the wall of my home in Gaza, on which Israel does not appear," Mahmoud Zahar, a senior Hamas member, said in an interview with Chinese media published this week.

"I am certain there is no place for Israel on this land."

Zahar, who was sworn in as Palestinian Authority foreign minister last week, said his Islamic terrorist group would continue to resist international calls to disarm as required by the "road map" peace plan with Israel.

NORTH AMERICA

Harvard school: No disavowal intended

The removal of Harvard University and Kennedy School logos from a paper alleging an all-powerful pro-Israel lobby did not signify disapproval, the Kennedy School said.

A statement distributed this week said that Stephen Walt, the school's academic dean who co-authored the paper together with the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer, recommended removing the logos because reports suggested the paper was an official Kennedy School document.

"It is in no way a judgment about the paper, and the goal was to put the focus where it belongs: on the ideas expressed by two international relations scholars," the school's statement said.

Such papers routinely are posted on the school's Web site "in order to facilitate discussion by scholars and others," and do not reflect the school's views.

Additionally, Walt's departure as dean this summer was not precipitated by the controversy but had been in the works.

Walt will remain as a professor.

UJC gives \$8 million in Katrina relief

The United Jewish Communities allocated \$8 million to help Hurricane Katrina victims.

The money will go to the Jewish communities of New Orleans; Baton Rouge, La.; and Biloxi, Miss., as well as to the general community.

The North American Jewish federation movement has raised more than \$28 million in Hurricane Katrina relief.

Senator wants U.S. off U.N. council

U.S. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) introduced a nonbinding resolution on the Senate floor calling on the United States not to participate in the U.N. Human Rights Council.

The Senate majority leader, who is believed to be considering a run for president in 2008, is gathering co-sponsors for the resolution before he brings it to the floor.

The council will replace the U.N. Human Rights Commission — long criticized as biased and anti-Israel — but falls short of the comprehensive reform of the U.N.'s human rights mechanism that many had urged.

Funders network announces grants

The Jewish Funders Network announced \$12 million in grant initiatives.

At the group's annual conference, being held in Denver, a new, \$6 million matching grant program for congregational schools was announced.

It was initiated by philanthropists Carol Auerbach, Diane Troderman and Ricky Shechtel, the network's new chairwoman.

The program will be a partnership of a group of private funders supported by both the network and the Jewish Education Service of North America.

The group also said that the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation had pledged \$2 million in matching funds for a new initiative to assist elderly poor.

The French Sacta-Rashi Foundation will make a \$1 million grant to the network's Matching Grants for Israel Initiative, re-upping on its initial gift to the program, which generated \$2.7 million after its launch last year.

WORLD

Study: Sweden cozied up to Nazis

Sweden cooperated with the Nazis more than previously thought, according to a Swedish investigation.

Swedish pastors stopped marriages between Germans and Swedish Jews for violating the Nuremberg Laws promoting Aryan prejudices.

Additionally, newspapers gagged criticism of Hitler, the occupation of Norway and the murder of millions of Jews in concentration camps, Reuters reported.

Immigration group expands to Britain

Nefesh B'Nefesh, an organization that facilitates aliyah for Jews from North America, is setting up shop in the United Kingdom.

The U.K. initiative will include chartered flights of British immigrants, as well as information sessions on aliyah planning.

"England is the most natural expansion for Nefesh B'Nefesh's services, especially as a result of the high interest that has been expressed from the wonderful Jewish community there," said Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, co-founder and executive director of Nefesh B'Nefesh.