

IN THE NEWS
Meridor named Israel's new envoy

Israel named the former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Sallai Meridor, as its next ambassador to the United States.

Meridor will succeed Daniel Ayalon when he wraps up his four-year tenure in Washington, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office announced Wednesday. The change is expected to take place in January.

Rice hopes for Abbas-Olmert summit

Condoleezza Rice said she hopes Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas will meet soon.

The U.S. secretary of state made her comments regarding a summit between the Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian Authority president Wednesday after meeting Abbas in the West Bank. She was scheduled to meet with Olmert later in the day in Israel.

U.N.: Troops can use force

The United Nations said its peacekeepers in southern Lebanon are empowered to use force against Hezbollah.

The UNIFIL peacekeeper force, which was more than doubled in strength under the U.N.-brokered cease-fire that ended the war between Israel and the Lebanese militia, published its rules of engagement this week. "Should the situation present any risk of resumption of hostile activities, UNIFIL rules of engagement allow U.N. forces to respond as required," the statement said. "UNIFIL commanders have sufficient authority to act forcefully when confronted with hostile activity of any kind."

The United Nations also said that the Lebanese army, which has deployed alongside UNIFIL in former Hezbollah strongholds, would set up checkpoints and inspect traffic for contraband — an apparent allusion to arms smuggling from nearby Syria.

WORLD REPORT

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Case of the non-kosher chicken could spark changes in industry

By JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — A recent case of retail fraud could lead to wholesale changes in the kosher meat industry.

The changes were discussed at two recent meetings of high-level rabbis and kashrut supervisors, one at the Orthodox Union headquarters in Manhattan and another in the heavily Orthodox neighborhood of Borough Park in Brooklyn. The meetings came after a kosher grocery in Monsey, N.Y., was found selling non-kosher chickens under a kosher label in early September.

According to reports, wholesaler Shevach Meats was stocking the shelves of its Hatzlocha Grocery with cheaper, non-kosher chicken that it repackaged and labeled as kosher.

The owner of Shevach Meats was outed after a slaughterhouse that was one of his suppliers realized Shevach Meats was still selling its product — even though the slaughterhouse had stopped supplying Shevach, according to Rabbi Menachem Genack, head of kashrut supervision for the Orthodox Union. Shevach Meats is supervised by a private rabbi in Monsey, not by the Orthodox Union.

The discovery caused a panic in areas that Shevach serves, ranging from Rockland County, a half-hour outside New York City, to upstate New York.

But what happened in Monsey could lead to tighter supervision at kosher retailers across the country — and that added supervision could end up costing consumers at the checkout line.

Orthodox rabbis in Monsey and nearby Spring Valley told everyone in the community to re-kasher any silverware that could have come in contact with meat from Shevach for the past 10 years. Leaders of the area's Orthodox community also called for a public fast before Yom Kippur as atonement for eating treif, or unkosher, meat, even though if community members ate the meat they did so unknowingly.

"For these people, it's a terrible tragedy," Genack said. "Keeping kosher is a basic tenet of their faith, and people compromised that by using other people in this terrible fashion. And if it happened once, it could happen again."

The implications of the supervision breakdown that allowed the Shevach Meats mishap have rocked the kosher world, said Rabbi Chaim Fogelman, head of kashrut supervision for OK Kosher, which supervises some 240,000 kosher products in 68 countries.

"This is probably the biggest kashrut disaster since Mount Sinai," Fogelman said.

The problem is that supposedly credible merchants took advantage of a system built on trust.

"In Monsey, it was a respectable person in the community," Fogelman said. "And in general, even though it wasn't our supervision, it could have happened under our watch. It's an extremely painful story in kashrut."

The only way to ensure that such fraud doesn't happen again is to have a full-time mashgiach, or kashrut supervisor, on hand

Continued on page 2

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ *Kosher retailers across the U.S. could face tighter supervision*

Continued from page 1

whenever any store, supplier or wholesaler operates — even though that would cost \$40,000-\$50,000 per year and could put some smaller retailers out of business, Fogelman said.

Genack stressed that it was not a problem of kosher slaughterhouses providing non-kosher meat, but a lack of supervision along the distribution chain from slaughterhouse to store.

While the Orthodox Union supervises slaughterhouses, the middlemen in the distribution chain and the retail stores fall under the auspices of local kashrut organizations.

Genack attended the Yiddish-language meeting in Brooklyn — held the week after Shevach Meats was outed — which included representatives from numerous Chasidic kashrut supervising organizations. Another meeting, at O.U. headquarters, included the owners of several kosher slaughterhouses, including Empire Chickens, Aaron's Rubashkin and International Glatt, as well as the rabbis that supervise their plants, Genack said.

Participants discussed how to ensure that meat sold in stores is the same kosher meat that comes out of the slaughterhouse.

Genack said they discussed creating better ways to identify a product as kosher, providing better supervision of after-slaughterhouse distributors — many of whom are not supervised at all — and creating some kind of accounting system

by which slaughterhouses can figure out if the amount of meat their retailers sell matches the amount the slaughterhouses produce.

"We have to create some kind of global accounting system so that we can verify the source of the product," said Genack, who has consulted with several large corporations about how they avoid retail fraud. But, he noted, "This isn't going to take a week to fix."

One head of a local kashrut organization in the New York metropolitan area, who wished to remain anonymous, said his agency has started detailing what each of the 12 kosher butchers it oversees has bought from wholesalers and sold to the public in recent years.

The agency started the laborious process of checking invoice receipts against sales receipts the week after the Shevach Meat scandal was exposed, the rabbi said, adding that it could take several months to complete the initial check and that its stores would be subject to rolling, random checks in the future.

Barry Rosenbaum of Empire Chickens said his company long has been concerned about product counterfeiting.

"We're well aware that buyers buy just a little" Empire chicken, "then buy cheaper" kosher "products from our

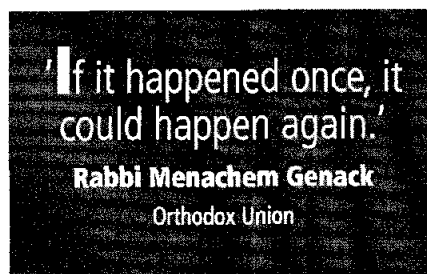
competitors, just to put our sticker in their window," Rosenbaum said. He said Empire receives reports nearly every week of such fraud, especially as many retailers unpack the whole chickens Empire sells them so they can cut them into smaller pieces that are sold separately.

Rosenbaum said he doesn't know how widespread is the problem of substituting treif meat for kosher meat, having heard "anecdotal stories" but having "no first-hand knowledge"

of other incidents. The problem, he said, is that "one incident is enough to affect thousands of people and shake the faith of people that have put their trust in the system."

The aftershocks rumbled through the kashrut community, said Rabbi Bin-yoman Lisbon, kashrut administrator of Kosher Supervision of America, a California-based organization that supervises more than 400 manufacturers.

"This was a shockwave that reverberated all over the world," he said. "It really shook the foundations of the kosher world. Here was a set-up of people who were trusted and who had an impeccable reputation, and yet you have a tragedy of this sort happen under one's own eyes. It's a wake-up call telling the system to take a look at every single store that we certify."



Controversial commander promoted

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Senate promoted a U.S. Air Force commander who promoted evangelical Christianity at the Air Force Academy. Brig. Gen. Johnny Weida was brought in to reform the Colorado Springs, Colo., academy in 2003, after a sexual harassment scandal.

He soon was embroiled in charges of religious coercion after he told cadets their first duty was to God and encouraged them to observe the national day of prayer.

The actions contributed to what some cadets said was a coercive atmosphere.

Weida apologized in June 2005, saying he "fell short." Last week, the Senate promoted him to major general at the Air Force's behest.

MIKEY WEINSTEIN, a former Air Force officer who is Jewish and who has campaigned against evangelism in the military, condemned the promotion.

"Weida has repeatedly imposed his own fundamentalist Christian biblical worldview on those attending mandatory military events and non-sectarian events," Weinstein said. "Weida's promotion sends the message that this illegal behavior is not only acceptable, but is applauded by our country's current leadership."

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Abortion, segregation highlight quiet court season

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish civil liberties groups are looking forward to a relatively quiet U.S. Supreme Court session in 2006-'07, with none of the major church-state issues that have roiled the community in recent years.

The court adjured arguments on the first Monday in October, when it traditionally opens, so its two Jewish justices could observe Yom Kippur. The seven non-Jewish judges met to release the court's docket.

The type of church-state cases that dominated Jewish interest in recent years, such as the display of religious artifacts in courts and public places, were absent.

Instead, Jewish groups are focused on two cases about issues that don't directly affect Judaism as a religion, but that traditionally have held the attention of Jewish civil libertarians: abortion and segregation.

The court will hear two cases Nov. 8 in which federal courts struck down parts of the ban on partial-birth abortion, which President Bush signed into law in 2003. In *Gonzales v. Carhart* and *Gonzales v. Planned Parenthood Federation of America*, pro-choice groups argue that the legislation does not have adequate health exceptions for women at risk, and bans such abortions as early as 13 weeks into gestation.

Jewish groups opposed to the ban and filing friend-of-the court-briefs include the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and the National Council of Jewish Women.

As recently as 2000, the court established that health exceptions are necessary in such laws, and the civil liberties groups are concerned that a court that now has a deeper conservative bench wants to revisit that precedent.

Sammie Moshenberg, who directs NCJW's Washington office, said she was afraid her group would be saying "I told you so" about its opposition last year to the nomination of John Roberts as chief justice and Samuel Alito as justice.

"We worked hard against the confirmation of Chief Justice Roberts and Samuel Alito because their records showed they had a particular point of view when it came to reproductive rights that indicated they would not look kindly to precedent," she said. "This is going to be the test. You never

want to be proved right; there's no great satisfaction when it comes to saying 'I told you so' when it comes to women's lives and health."

Agudath Israel of America, a group representing the fervently Orthodox, said it planned to support the government's case in the partial-birth abortion matter.

The other case capturing Jewish interest involves attempts to desegregate districts in Seattle and Lexington, Ky. Groups filing friend-of-the-court briefs include the ADL, the American Jewish Committee and the NCJW. The Jewish groups favor the municipalities.

In both instances, the municipalities are introducing desegregation measures

because natural demographic trends have rolled back desegregation efforts from the 1970s. In some cases, schools have become more than 85 percent minority.

Jewish interest was piqued because the Bush administration is backing parental groups that oppose the desegregation measures in the cases, *Parents Involved v. Seattle* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County*. The cases, which have been combined, will be heard in late November or early December.

The groups are concerned that the Bush administration will argue that the municipalities are backing affirmative action — something Jewish civil libertarians traditionally oppose as reverse discrimination — instead of understanding the initiatives as rolling back discrimination. ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Hungarian Jews can't bank on compensation

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Growing up in small-town Hungary, Endre Schvab dreamed of being a pharmacist.

But born in 1924, he came of age in an era when Hungary restricted its Jews from enrolling in university. Learning a trade was more realistic.

"So the whole family decided he would become an optometrist," recalls his daughter, Agnes Somlai.

To that end, Endre's father, a wealthy wheat farmer and goose-feather merchant named Imre, socked away enough bank savings for his only child to one day build a large home and workshop, near the family homestead in Mindszent.

Such idyllic plans were derailed in 1944, with the Nazi occupation of Hungary. Endre was deported to Dachau.

It was two years before Endre returned to Mindszent. There was nothing left, though: His parents, aunts, uncles and cousins had been deported and killed in Auschwitz. The one thing he found was the bank book, but Schvab learned the Hungarian government had confiscated it.

It's this savings account that his daughter is today fighting to recover.

Hers is one of 10 such cases that, six decades later, heirs or the account-holders themselves are now pushing through the Hungarian courts, with no success so far.

"They probably won't pay, which is absolutely disgusting," Somlai, 57, says in a phone interview from Sydney, Australia, where she immigrated to in 1982 with her daughter, Barbara, now 27. "I'm not doing

this for the money, but for the principle. It's about justice, nothing else."

While countries from Switzerland to Israel have been prodded to return some of the millions stashed by Holocaust victims, the Hungarian situation is unique: The currency back then, the pengo, soon spiraled into a record-breaking hyperinflation, prompting Hungary to switch to a new currency — and rendering the pengo worthless.

Further complicating the situation is that relevant legislation — through fascism, communism and now democracy — has changed several times since then.

"It's a very difficult legal problem," says Peter Gal, the attorney whose firm represents each of the Jewish plaintiffs and has devoted 10 years to the issue.

"You can't just use today's laws, but you need to know the acts in effect then — and how they were used — and harmonize the two."

The Hungarian authorities, though, appear untroubled by the complexity.

In court, lawyers for the Ministry of Finance and Hungarian National Bank reportedly avoid the moral question of compensating for seized assets, focusing instead on technicalities: how to compensate for something with no official value, and because it no longer exists, how to calculate its value anyway?

In statements to JTA, spokesmen for both the ministry and bank declined to go into details or respond to critics, citing the fact the cases are still ongoing. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Congress members urge dialogue with Iran

A bipartisan slate of 19 members of the U.S. House of Representatives called on President Bush to initiate direct talks with Iran.

"The U.S. has not pursued formal diplomatic dialogue for nearly 26 years," said the letter, sent last week, before Congress adjourned for midterm elections. "This 'no negotiation' stance has not yielded positive results."

The Bush administration wants Iran to stop enriching uranium, a step toward building a nuclear bomb, and to end its backing for terrorists who target Israel before it engages Iran in any way.

"Dialogue is needed to explain clearly the compelling nature of America's objectives in the Middle East," the letter said.

"More than 25 years of isolating Iran has moved us farther from, not closer to, achieving these goals."

The letter acknowledges the "inflammatory rhetoric" of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has denied the Holocaust and called for an end to Israel, but says the United States could engage moderates in the government.

One signatory is Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.), the influential chairman of the House foreign appropriations subcommittee, who is retiring.

N.J. federations could become security model

New Jersey's 12 Jewish federations may become the first among U.S. federations to provide Community Emergency Response Team training to their members.

CERT units are meant to augment emergency responses in times of crisis, terror attacks and natural disaster.

State Homeland Security officials met with representatives from New Jersey's federations Wednesday to discuss the logistics of creating federation-based units. "The more people that we can train and organize to assist in a disaster or emergency, the better it would be for everyone in terms of homeland security," said Capt. Howard Butt, New Jersey's Citizen Corps Coordinator, who attended the meeting.

"They are a community that is always concerned and unfortunately is the target of terrorist activity."

Camp guard loses U.S. citizenship

A U.S. court revoked the citizenship of a man who served as a Nazi concentration camp guard.

The U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh took the action last Friday regarding Anton Geiser, of Sharon, Pa.

A guard at Sachsenhausen and other camps during World War II, Geiser, 81, immigrated to the United States from Austria in 1956 and became a citizen in 1962.

The action against Geiser was initiated by the Office for Special Investigations, the U.S. Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security.

N.Y. federation helps northern Israel

The UJA-Federation of New York is funding a volunteer group that is rebuilding bomb shelters in northern Israel.

The federation granted \$1.65 million this week to Livnot U'Lehibanot, a group that draws Diaspora Jewish volunteers, many of them from North America, into learning and volunteering in northern Israel.

MIDDLE EAST

Nobel winner has Israel connection

The winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry is a visiting professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The university congratulated Roger Kornberg for his win Wednesday, in recognition of his research into how genes are copied.

Kornberg, a professor of structural biology at Stanford University, is also a fellow at Hebrew University's department of biological chemistry.

"We are very proud and congratulate Prof. Kornberg who has been working with us for many years," said the university's president, Menachem Magidor.

"We are honored that Prof. Kornberg and other leading scientists from around the world view the Hebrew University as an attractive academic institution at which to conduct their research."

Jordan pulls Qatar envoy over U.N. vote

Jordan recalled its ambassador from Qatar because the Gulf nation would not back a Jordanian diplomat who has warm ties with Jews as U.N. secretary-general.

"The government recalled its ambassador to Doha for consultations," government spokesman Nasser Judeh told The Jordan Times on Tuesday.

In the latest straw poll among Security Council members, Qatar — the sole Arab nation now on the council — backed Ban Ki-Moon, the Korean foreign minister.

Ban is now seen as a shoo-in, having garnered 14 out of the 15 votes in the vote Monday.

Jordan strongly backed Prince Zeid, its U.N. ambassador, for the post and expected Arab solidarity from Qatar. Zeid's chances have reportedly been harmed because of his close ties with U.S. Jewish groups.

Judeh said the U.N. vote was one of several reasons why Jordan pulled its envoy.

Israeli gays courted after quip

Israel's military chief of staff moved to calm gays and lesbians upset by remarks he made that were construed as homophobic. Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz told Yediot Achronot last month that the Israel Defense Forces includes "men and women, and actually there are others, about whom it is forbidden to speak."

After Israeli gay rights groups protested, Halutz met with community representatives to make clear that the remarks were made in jest and that he did not intend to disparage gays and lesbians. "We welcome all the sons and daughters of the homosexual community in our ranks," he said.

El Al cuts prices

El Al is trimming its ticket prices. Israel's largest airline announced Wednesday that, due to a decline in the price of oil, it would cut fuel surcharges on its flights.

The reductions are to come into effect Oct. 18, and will be between \$28-\$120 on flights from Tel Aviv to North America or Asia, and \$18-\$70 on flights to Europe.

WORLD

Conservative meeting on Yom Kippur raises hackles

Britain's Conservative Party is being criticized for holding its annual meeting on Yom Kippur.

The scheduling forced observant members of the party, which boasts a large Jewish constituency and membership, including several prominent members of Parliament, to miss the first two days of the meeting, which began Sunday and ended Wednesday.

Although the scheduling snafu has been labeled an oversight, some party members are calling for party leader David Cameron to conduct an investigation.