

IN THE NEWS
Iran seen stopping Shalit release

Iran reportedly bribed the top Hamas leader to prevent the release of an Israeli soldier being held in the Gaza Strip.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority recently were on the verge of a deal for the recovery of Cpl. Gilad Shalit, but an Iranian delegation paid Hamas' supreme leader, Khaled Meshaal, \$50 million to prevent it, Yediot Achronot reported Thursday.

Report: Hezbollah used cluster bombs

Hezbollah used cluster bombs against Israel during the Lebanon war, a watchdog group found. In a report issued Thursday, Human Rights Watch cited testimony indicating that the Lebanese militia fired more than 100 rockets containing cluster bombs into northern Israel. Israeli forces have themselves come under criticism for using similar munitions against suspected Hezbollah hideouts during the 34-day war.

"We are disturbed to discover that not only Israel but also Hezbollah used cluster munitions in their recent conflict, at a time when many countries are turning away from this kind of weapon precisely because of its impact on civilians," read the report by the New York-based group.

Moscow synagogue centennial celebrated

The 100th anniversary of the Moscow Choral Synagogue was marked Wednesday.

Several hundred people, including visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, attended the celebration.

On Thursday, Olmert visited the Marina Roscha Synagogue. During the Soviet era, Jewish activists used to gather outside the Choral Synagogue, with KGB agents watching, but refused to enter it because it was a "show" synagogue for the regime.

WORLD REPORT

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Jewish political partisans in U.S. engaged in pre-election outreach

By RON KAMPEAS and MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a turbulent midterm election campaign that could culminate with a major political realignment in the U.S. Congress, candidates are constant at least with one constituency: Jewish voters.

In their campaigns for the Jewish vote on Nov. 7, Republicans are pitching support for Israel and anti-terrorism, as they have for years. Democrats are reminding voters of the party's traditional support for Israel but are emphasizing health care, keeping church separate from state and supporting reproductive rights, as they have for years.

What's different is the intensity of the outreach, with major ad buys in Jewish media and innovative grass-roots efforts, a consequence of a fevered campaign that could see the Republican majority ousted in one or both houses of Congress.

In six tight races for the U.S. Senate and in 25 to 30 tight races for the U.S. House of Representatives, swaying just a few hundred votes could be the margin for victory.

Losing one house could significantly alter the Washington agenda and bog down President Bush's final two years in office in defenses of how he handled the Iraq war, national security, civil liberties and last year's hurricane season.

"This is going to be a nail-biter election," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

"They're looking everywhere they can to pick up votes here and there," he said of his party.

One measure of the seriousness of the Republican outreach has been the RJC's mas-

"I don't think Israel has any legal or moral justification for their massive bombing of the entire nation of Lebanon."

"I represent the vast majority of Democrats."

—Jimmy Carter
August 15, 2006
The Jewish Magazine



Recent polling suggests Carter does represent Democrats in their abandonment of Israel's right to defend itself.

Support for Israel by Party



It's time you ask yourself: Does the Democratic Party still represent you?

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT US AT WWW.RJC.ORG

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT US AT WWW.NJDC.ORG

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

RJC
A Republican Jewish Coalition advertisement.

sive advertising campaign in Jewish media. The ads allege that support for Israel has eroded among rank-and-file Democrats.

The National Jewish Democratic Council has responded with ads that say the RJC campaign undermines support for Israel.

Unlike the RJC's national campaign, however, the NJDC is targeting specific competitive races.

Ira Forman, the NJDC executive director, identified ad buys this week in New Jersey, where Sen. Robert Menendez, a Democrat, faces a strong challenge from Tom Kean; and

Continued on page 2

■ *Republicans and Democrats are reaching out to Jewish voters this election season*

Continued from page 1

in Missouri, where state auditor Claire McCaskill threatens Sen. Jim Talent, a Republican.

That reflects the overall Jewish Democratic effort, which is focusing money where it is most needed and getting out the vote in races Democrats think they can win.

In contrast, Brooks says the RJC ads are less about individual races and are aimed more at what has long been the RJC's overreaching goal: expanding Jewish membership in a party that Jews have traditionally rejected 3-to-1.

"There's a competitive political environment going on, and we're using that opportunity to help educate the Jewish community; it's fertile ground to convey our message, raise our profile and sign new members," he said. "It's why we're also doing as stuff where there aren't competitive races."

He cited for example his ad buys in California and New York, where urban voters overwhelmingly favor Democrats.

Observers say the frequency of the ads — a new one appears virtually every week — is unprecedented, and the RJC is showing no sign of relenting.

An RJC pitch to its members last week for funds to place more ads gleefully noted "what Democrats are saying about our ads: 'obnoxious,' 'dangerous,' 'shameful,' 'disgusting,' 'offensive,' 'misleading.'"

That doesn't mean Republicans have given up on Jewish votes in competitive races this session, Brooks said; but where-

as the ads look to the long term, the short-term strategy relies more on grass-roots outreach.

Jewish Republicans like Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota and Ari Fleischer, the former White House spokesman, have made Jewish appearances throughout New Jersey to support Kean.

On Tuesday, Ken Mehlman, the Jewish national party chairman, stumped among Jews in West Palm Beach for Joe Negron, the Republican running to replace U.S. Rep. Mark Foley (R-Fla.), forced to quit what was once a safe Republican seat after revelations of his sexual overtures to minors.

Another indicator of Republican outreach is a weekly conference call organized by Jeff Ballabon, an Orthodox conservative political activist. Geared toward like-minded activists, the callers discuss which races and political issues deserve funding, assistance or increased attention.

"The purpose is not so much to debate and pick brains, as much as networking and seeking assistance and information," Ballabon said. The calls are modeled after weekly meetings conservative Republican officials hold in Washington, organized by Grover Norquist, credited in part for catapulting the Republicans to power in the mid-1990s.

The conference calls alleviate the sense of minority status some Jewish conservatives feel in their communities, he said. "It's connecting people who really didn't know each other before."

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), in a tight re-election race with opponent Bob Casey, has joined some of the calls, as has former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, considered a possible presidential candidate in 2008. White House and congressional aides also often join in.

The National Jewish Democratic Council has been on the phone as well, orchestrating calls to get key candidates talking to Jewish, local and national media about Jewish issues.

Candidates like New Jersey's Menendez and Tim Mahoney, who is seeking the Florida House seat formerly held by Foley, talk about more than just Israel. They seek to reach out to Jewish voters on issues like

abortion, stem cells and the separation of church and state.

That contrasts with the party's national campaign, which tends to focus on areas Democrats tended to cede to Republicans in 2002 and 2004: Iraq and national security. With Bush scoring low on both issues now, Democrats are seizing on those issues.

Among the Jews, however, domestic policies are the natural emphasis for Democrats, said Matt Dorf, a Democratic strategist.

"The message is that Jewish Democrats do not have to compromise their values to vote," he said. "They trust Democrats on Israel and on national security, and they don't have to compromise their values on the environment, health care, reproductive freedom, church-state and stem cells."

That doesn't mean Democrats are ceding ground on national security and foreign policy when they reach out to Jews, Dorf said. In the conference calls, virtually every Democratic candidate says that by mirroring the United States in Iraq, Bush has empowered Iran, Israel's deadliest enemy.

"Israel and the United States are less safe than they were six years ago," Dorf said.

Republicans counter that the Democratic Party's grass roots appear to be sliding away from Israel, according to national polls that show majorities of Republicans favoring Israel and pluralities among Democrats expressing neutral views about the Middle East.

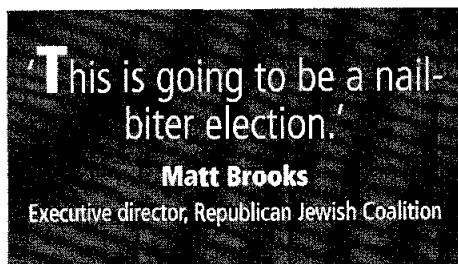
Democrats call it a scare tactic that could undermine bipartisan support for Israel, but Brooks says he's just the messenger.

"We're illuminating a real problem within the Democratic Party," he said, arguing that the "progressive, radical left" has become the party's mainstream.

Bush's unstinting support for Israel in this summer's war with Hezbollah on the Lebanese border created an opportunity to highlight differences, Brooks said.

"People intellectually understand we're all in the same boat, we face the same threats from fascists," he said.

(Ron Kampeas is JTA's Washington bureau chief; Matthew E. Berger is a correspondent for Congressional Quarterly.)



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Cardin's slow and steady Senate run

By JENNIFER JACOBSON

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ben Cardin's candidacy for the U.S. Senate is both dogged and buoyed by his stubborn rootedness — a prosaic quality the Maryland congressman and his supporters agree stems from his Jewish commitment.

News media have cast this election as a race between Cardin, a 62-year-old Democratic elder statesman known as a plodding, determined consensus-builder, and Lt. Gov. Michael Steele, 47, an African American Republican who has made a splash in a short time in politics.

"Steele has an advantage of being much more telegenic and a better show horse kind of politician," says Paul Herrnson, the director of the Center for American Politics at the University of Maryland. Cardin, on the other hand, is a "workhorse, not a show horse. Elections are much more about show horses."

The congressman from Maryland's 3rd District is running for the seat vacated by Sen. Paul Sarbanes, a Democrat. Republicans have devoted plenty of resources to getting one of the party's few black candidates elected to a seat long held by Democrats.

Steele appears outgoing and well-dressed. In one TV ad, he snuggled a puppy. Cardin pushed back with an ad that said Steele also snuggled up to Bush.

In the most recent polls, Cardin leads Steele 47-41 percent, with 12 percent undecided.

Cardin's campaign emphasizes his 40 years of legislative experience. His supporters say his years in the Maryland House of Delegates and then in the U.S. House of Representatives, along with his reputation for bipartisanship, will ensure him a victory.

They say his willingness to cross party lines and his positions on abortion (he's pro-choice) and stem cell research (he supports it) appeal to a majority of Maryland voters, where voter registration is predominately Democrat.

Steele's spokeswoman, Melissa Sellers, notes that The Baltimore Sun named him a "winner" of the 2003 legislative session for his bipartisan efforts. Last month he unveiled the "Steele Democrats," a group of registered Democrats who are supporting him.

There is "a large, diverse base of support that is supporting Michael Steele," Sellers says, "because he's a fresh voice for change

from business as usual in Washington."

Herrnson says Steele is savvy to cast himself as an agent of change — but he says the best counterattack for Cardin is to stay true to himself.

"The best strategy for Cardin is to run on who he is" and "point out who Steele is," Herrnson says, someone "who spent his career trying to elect George Bush," the president who has wallowed between 30 and 40 percent in approval ratings for over a year.

Cardin's supporters say his strong identification as a Jew is the key to his solid, if stolid, reputation.

"I can remember when Ben first went to Annapolis," says Myrna Cardin, his wife of more than 40 years. There "really

weren't many Jews. And he kind of made a vow to himself that he would be a proud Jew wherever he went. I do think this has kept him in good stead, that he's not hiding from his religion."

Cardin says Judaism informs the decisions he makes as a lawmaker.

"What my Jewish background teaches me, the concept of giving back, tzedakah, has always been part of my life," he says, seated in the U.S. Capitol one recent morning where he spoke to JTA between votes on border security amendments.

He also cites tikkun olam, the Jewish tenet of repairing the world. "My father told me I could make a difference," he says.

Cardin's father, Meyer, served in the Maryland House of Delegates and was a judge. Cardin says his father's activism, especially in the Zionist cause, inspired his own, as did the close-knit Jewish community.

Cardin says his public school was 98 percent Jewish and his synagogue was right down the street from his home. "I was 7 or 8 years old before I realized that not everybody in the world was Jewish," he says and laughs.

"His family is the essence of what Jewish Baltimore is all about," says Art Abramson, the executive director of the Baltimore Jewish Council.

Cardin's first cousin by marriage is Shoshana Cardin, a veteran Jewish com-

munal leader who has held many state and national positions, including past chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, past president of the Council of Jewish Federations and JTA, among other organizations. His wife is a past president of the Baltimore Jewish Council and Jewish Community Center. Cardin's nephew, Jon Cardin, is a delegate in the Maryland Legislature.

Cardin's "always been there for us on issues concerning Israel and world Jewry," Abramson says. Cardin is the ranking member of the Helsinki Commission, the

congressional agency that monitors human rights at home and abroad.

Abramson also says Cardin earns Jewish points for being strong on social

justice issues such as health care and energy. Cardin says a Senate berth will help him advance universal health coverage and energy independence.

But Cardin is no ideologue, friends say. "He's a guy who I think compromises," says Samuel "Sandy" Rosenberg, a Maryland delegate and a Democrat who served with Cardin in the Statehouse. "He wants to get the job done."

Cardin cites as an example of bipartisanship the Portman-Cardin bill on retirement savings, written with former U.S. Rep. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), who is now the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

While Cardin's supporters applaud his commitment to the nuts and bolts of legislation, media accounts often say he lacks charisma. Newspaper articles describe him as mild-mannered and less than gregarious. He is short and stocky, with a white ring of hair around his bald head.

Such observations puzzle him. "My grandchildren think I'm the funniest person in the world," he says. "My wife thinks I have charisma."

Myrna Cardin says charisma seems beside the point. "I've never heard a constituent say, 'Ben, tell me a joke, go line dancing with me,'" she says. Instead, voters ask him to help with their Social Security, she says.

She acknowledges her husband is more reserved but says he is genuine. "What you see is what you get."

Cardin's supporters say his strong identification as a Jew is the key to his solid, if stolid, reputation.

Finding Judaism through books

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — A dozen women are sitting in a second-floor lounge at San Francisco's Jewish Community Center, heatedly discussing the first volume of Maggie Anton's trilogy, "Rashi's Daughters."

"I thought it was a cheap 'Red Tent' imitation," says one woman, referring to Anita Diamant's popular biblical-era novel.

Another said she "gobbled up" the bits on 11th-century midwifery.

The women, ranging in age from their mid-40s to their early 70s, are members of a monthly book group. The group isn't advertised as "Jewish" but the women all are Jewish, as are most of the books they read.

Several of them go to other Jewish book groups. Nine are JCC members. Five take Jewish adult education classes.

Only three belong to a synagogue.

"I like to read, I like to learn," Roslyn Rhodes says. "I don't have any Jewish background. Even when I go to temple, I feel like, why is this being said? Why is that being said?"

Judith King goes even further: She flies in from Colorado once a month "just to feel Jewish again."

For these women, the book club is a chance to stretch their minds and get together with other women in a friendly, supportive setting.

For them and thousands of others across the country, it's also a way to connect with their Jewish heritage and the greater Jewish community.

"Jewish book clubs are growing," confirms Jonathan Schwartz, director of the Jewish Community Library in San Francisco. The library sponsors "Book Club in a Box," sending free packages of 12 books, plus discussion guides, to more than 70 local Jewish book clubs.

As such clubs proliferate, the traditional demographic — older women — is changing. Clubs are skewing younger, moving online and targeting niche audiences.

"The initial catalyst to joining is social," says Carolyn Hessel, director of the Jewish Book Council, which sponsors national Jewish Book Month, to be held this year from Nov. 16-Dec. 16. "It has to be a group where people get along."

When the council started a recent study of book clubs, Hessel was surprised at the wide variety they found, including clubs where daughters cook for their mothers



Sue Fishkoff

Women discuss a book at a San Francisco Jewish Community Center book club.

before each discussion, and another where women meet in the park with their children and watch the kids play while discussing books.

It's the informal Jewish education that appeals to people, Hessel says.

"They are nonthreatening. Anyone, regardless of their Judaic background, can feel comfortable," she says.

Most book clubs used to be informal, held in members' living rooms. Today more and more institutions — from JCCs to Hadassah groups to synagogues — are sponsoring them, both to meet members' needs and to attract new people.

Temple Israel, a large Reform congregation in West Bloomfield, Mich., sponsors six book clubs. Eight years ago, Rachel Kamin, the temple's libraries and media center director, started a mother-daughter group.

Rabbis told her she should run one for boys as well. When the boys showed up, dads in tow, Kamin was "shocked," she says.

Twenty-five synagogues take part in One Book, One Congregation, a national program launched early this year by Nextbook, a three-year-old organization that promotes Jewish reading.

Based on similar mass reading projects sponsored by cities from San Francisco to New York, One Book, One

Congregation" asks members of participating shuls to read the same book at the same time. Books are chosen from the Jewish Encounters series of short, lively books on Jewish personalities and themes published by Nextbook and Schocken Books.

Nextbook offers a 40 percent discount on orders of 20 or more books. They bent the rules, however, for six Jewish prisoners in Pennsylvania who ordered Robert Pinsky's "The Life of David" for their book group.

A similar community-wide read is taking place this fall in Long Island, N.Y., with the goal of using Jewish books to stimulate discussion around core Jewish ideas. Four dozen groups — including Hadassah branches, synagogues, Jewish community

centers, libraries and even a women's studies group at the local community college — all are reading Simon Wiesenthal's "The Sunflower" in preparation for six weeks of discussion, films and lectures exploring the Jewish concept of forgiveness.

"We're using the explosion of interest in book clubs and

Jewish books as an opportunity to discuss different ideas," says project coordinator Sharie Calderone.

As the discussions continue and move to other topics, the hope is that a sense of one large community, brought together by its consideration of the same ideas, will emerge.

"We call it building community, one book at a time," Calderone says. ■

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

Book clubs 'are
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background, can feel
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Carolyn Hessel
Director, Jewish Book Council

Foer gets top book award

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — The people have spoken, and they spake Foer.

"Everything is Illuminated," Jonathan Safran Foer's tragi-comic tale of a young American Jew's journey through Ukraine in search of his grandfather's roots, is the first winner of JBooks.com's people's choice award for the decade's best work of Jewish fiction.

The award, and a \$5,000 check, will be presented Nov. 15 at the Koret International Jewish Book Awards ceremony in San Francisco.

That doesn't mean Foer's novel really is the decade's best book, not by the usual standards. It just means that the more than 1,500 readers who cast their votes in the six-week, online contest liked it better than the other five contenders, a list judges whittled down from 115 readers' suggestions.

The credence one gives to such an award depends on whether one prefers a laurel wreath bestowed by the crowd or the critics.

Online voting tends to draw a younger crowd, and is subject to ballot box-stuffing, organizers admit, although they say they weeded out suspicious patterns.

Certainly the contest, which ran Sept. 6 to Oct. 16, got lots of folks involved in choosing their favorite Jewish book, and that's what the organizers wanted.

"The idea is to give readers access to the awards," to reward "what people are reading and enjoying and talking about," says project manager Jane Hadley.

The People's Choice award is part of current efforts to make Jewish books more accessible — or, rather, to reward those books that are more accessible, a conscious goal of the newly restyled Koret awards. The Koret awards are being run this year for the first time by Jewish Family and Life in cooperation with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

The Koret awards, sponsored by the Koret Family Foundation since 1998, have been "criticized as too heavy and highbrow," says newly appointed Jewish Family and Life CEO Amir Cohen. "We've brought it down a notch. It's still prestigious, but it speaks to a larger piece of the Jewish book-reading public."

Jewish Family and Life founder Yossi Abramowitz, chair of the awards steering

committee, says the new Koret awards are actively trying to influence Jewish book-buying.

"Our goal is not only to honor excellence, but to help book clubs in their buying decisions and influence Jewish culture," says Abramowitz, speaking from his new home in Israel.

Noting that most Jewish book clubs are "still overwhelmingly women, highly educated, meeting informally," he says the changes were "very much made with these book clubs and these women in mind."

The changes were also made with younger readers in mind. Along with the five Koret awards, three other groups are honoring emerging Jewish writers during the same ceremony.

The Koret ceremony has been moved from April to November, to coincide with the year's biggest book-buying season. Categories have been tweaked to attract entries that readers and book groups are more likely to purchase.

"Fiction," the mainstay of most book clubs, remains untouched, but gone are the categories of "history" and "biography, autobiography and literary studies," which, say Koret organizers, tended to reward books too scholarly or esoteric to appeal to lay readers. They were replaced by "Jewish life and living," a more wide-ranging category that drew 127 entries this year, more than any other.

The winners, and many of the finalists, were not always the obvious choices.

In the "Jewish life and living" category, Rochel Berman's "Dignity Beyond Death," a gentle, somewhat obscure book about Jewish burial societies, beat out Deborah Lipstadt's better-known "History on Trial," the chronicle of her well-publicized legal battle against Holocaust denier David Irving.

And while Israeli author David Grossman is well known to American Jewish readers, both for his prize-winning books and his leftist politics, "Her Body Knows," which took this year's fiction award, is "sexy, very racy," says Abramowitz, "an interesting choice."

Is this wrong? That depends on how one understands the role of book awards. Are they meant to reward the most rarefied tastes, or those of most people? Should they honor literary or academic excellence, or books that readers will want to devour?

The market for Jewish books is hot, and book clubs are fast proliferating. If awards want to be relevant, organizers say, they need to be part of the popular dialogue, even as they encourage excellence.

The National Jewish Book Awards, administered by the Jewish Book Council, have been edging in that direction for years. Council director Carolyn Hessel, the prime mover behind the fast-multiplying Jewish book fairs that take place every fall during Jewish Book Month, is an unabashed fan of promoting books that people will want to read.

There are 82 Jewish book fairs scheduled this year from late October through February, she says, and the council is sending 150 authors on speaking tours. The combination, she asserts, sells "a hell of a lot of books."

The winners, and many of the finalists, were not always the obvious choices.

Winners list

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Winners of the 2006 Koret International Book Awards:

Jewish life and living: "Dignity Beyond Death," Rochel Berman.

Jewish thought: "Betraying Spinoza," Rebecca Goldstein.

Fiction: "Her Body Knows," David Grossman.

BabagaNewz children's literature: "Before You Were Born," Howard Schwartz, illustrated by Kristina Swarner.

JBooks.com people's choice award for the decade's best work of Jewish fiction: "Everything is Illuminated," Jonathan Safran Foer.

Reform Judaism prize for Jewish fiction: "Kafka in Bronteland," Tamar Yellin.

National Foundation for Jewish Culture's Samuel Goldberg and Sons Foundation Prize for emerging writer of Jewish fiction: "The Discontinuity of Small Things," Kevin Haworth.

Anne and Richard Cowan writer's award of the Jewish community endowment fund: Julie Orringer.

Blood libel persists in Spain

By JEROME SOCOLOVSKY

LA GUARDIA, Spain (JTA) — The cavernous church is packed with Spaniards dressed in their finest. In front, six young women wear white bridal gowns with sashes and mantilla veils propped up in the Spanish royal style.

They're Spain's equivalent of prom queens. And the scene at the church in La Guardia evokes the tableaux in countless Spanish towns and villages where annual fiestas are celebrated in honor of the local patron saint.

Until the priest gives the sermon.

It's about el Santo Ni o de la Guardia — the Holy Child of La Guardia — a 5-year-old Christian boy who, according to local legend, died a martyr's death in La Guardia in 1491.

"We are all called upon to live like he did," the priest says.

He makes no mention of who killed the boy. But a woman sitting up front, holding a white flag with golden tassels, has no doubt who the culprits were.

"It was the Jews," Milagros Redajo says with a stern look after Mass. "They abducted him and brought him here to La Guardia and did to him what they had done to Jesus: They crucified him."

Historians say the story of the Holy Child of La Guardia is not only a myth; it derives from one of the most vile anti-Semitic slanders of medieval Europe — the blood libel.

In its current form, it's based on a verdict handed down by the Spanish Inquisition on Nov. 16, 1491. In the ruling, the Inquisition condemned seven "heretic judaizers" to be burned at the stake for murdering a Christian boy. An eighth person was convicted later.

The two Jews and six conversos — Jews who had converted to Christianity in an atmosphere of anti-Jewish hysteria — issued partial confessions under torture about having abducted the boy in Toledo and brought him to La Guardia to crucify him.

According to the legend, they whipped him, made him bear a cross and subjected him to the same sufferings that the New Testament describes as having been inflicted on Jesus.

In La Guardia, the accused allegedly removed the child's heart and performed a ritual with a communion wafer stolen from a church in order to poison the Christian population's water supply.

The blood libel had been used against Jews in Europe well before La Guardia, but this version is believed to have been instrumental in stirring up support for the expulsion, a year later, of a people who had lived in Spain for centuries.

As was clear at the most recent celebration of the annual festival in late September, many people in this town of around 2,000 consider the legend literal truth. A plaque on the whitewashed wall of the Hermitage of the Holy Child, on the side of a mountain next to La Guardia, illustrates the legend, and carries a dedication at the bottom that reads, "The holy innocent child from Toledo, patron saint of this town, was crucified by various Jews out of hatred for our savior Jesus Christ." The plaque is dated Sept. 1, 2004.

An estimated 30,000 Jews live in Spain today. For the leadership of the Jewish community, it's shocking that the legend survives.

"We are in the 21st century, and they're still saying that the Jews killed Christ," says Jacques Laredo, secretary of the Jewish community of Madrid. "We've tried to do something about it. We've had meetings with the Church, but they've been fruitless."

The efforts date back to the early 1990s, when former Israeli President Yitzhak Navon — who is of Sephardi origin — brought attention to the La Guardia celebrations in his Israeli TV documentary "Out of Spain."

Laredo says the problem is not the Vatican. He notes that the former papal nuncio in Spain — the pope's ambassador — encouraged the Jewish community to take the matter up with the Spanish bishops' conference.

But, Laredo says, "In Spain, the church is very reactionary."

Still, Laredo says most Jews in Spain today don't feel threatened by what goes on in La Guardia.

"These are backward traditions, like bullfights and the running of the bulls in Pamplona," he says. "We'd like them to get

rid of it. We just hope that someday they'll open their eyes."

But a tradition that's seen as offensive to Islam is being adapted. The Festivals of the Moors and the Christians, which commemorate the defeat of the Muslim armies in 1492, are celebrated in a number of towns, mainly near the eastern city of Valencia. In some versions, the high point of the festival has been the burning of a turbaned effigy referred to as La Mahoma, the Spanish name for Mohammed.

Earlier this year, the National Union of Festive Associations of Moors and Christians took action after Muslims rioted in Europe and the Middle East in response to cartoon depictions of Mohammed in a Danish newspaper.

"If you have to omit something so that an extremist somewhere in the world doesn't have a pretext, all the better," association president Francisco Lopez Perez

said at the time. "Because the extremists are looking for pretexts. So the rest of us, we should avoid providing them, even unintentionally."

The Spanish government has pledged to fight all forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism. Last year, it sponsored

the 55-nation Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance, held in Cordoba.

But there's no sign of any change in La Guardia. The regional government of Castilla La Mancha likes to attract Jewish tourists from abroad to its capital, Toledo, where medieval synagogues have been restored. But Soledad Ruiz Perez, a regional government spokeswoman, scoffed at the idea of revising the festival in La Guardia.

Despite the villagers' own statements saying they take the story literally, Ruiz Perez claimed that "they don't even talk about the legend in the town."

Father Florencio Sanchez is the village priest in La Guardia. He didn't give the sermon; that was done by a clergyman sent by the archdiocese of Toledo. But Sanchez defends the legend, which packs the church at a time of severely declining attendance.

"We're not anti-Semites," he says. "We are Christians and we forgive everybody." ■

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

'We are in the 21st century, and they're still saying that the Jews killed Christ.'

Jacques Laredo

Secretary, Madrid Jewish community

ARTS & CULTURE

'O Jerusalem' comes to big screen

By BRETT KLINE

PARIS (JTA) — The subject of Jerusalem is a difficult one for any artist to tackle. But it was the challenge of a lifetime for French Jewish director Elie Chouraqui to turn the acclaimed 1972 book, "O Jerusalem," into a feature film.

Written by journalists Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, "O Jerusalem" is an account of the battles in and around Jerusalem in Israel's 1948 War of Independence. It reads as a mosaic of leaders and ordinary people among Arabs, Jews, Britons, Americans and United Nations officials — and the film embellishes it with several imaginary characters.

Chouraqui opens with documentary footage of the final bombing of Berlin, followed by the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp by U.S. soldiers.

From there, the director invents a friendship in postwar New York between Bobby Goldman, an American Jewish soldier who helped liberate Dachau, and Said Chahine, a Palestinian student in New York from the wealthy Sheik Jarrah district of Jerusalem, whose uncle was a Palestinian leader — in real life, a member of the prominent Husseini clan.

"The challenge was to develop characters whom the public becomes attached to on both sides, and still give as accurate an account as possible of the fighting in Jerusalem in 1947-'48," Chouraqui said.

Goldman and Chahine go to Jerusalem, where they find themselves on opposite sides.

Chouraqui himself plays a role based on Dov Joseph, the Haganah military governor of Jerusalem.

Joseph's daughter gets only three lines in the book — when her death is announced during fighting in the South — but she has a main supporting role in the film and is played by Shirel, a young Franco-American singer well known in France.

Hadassah Limpel, also mentioned briefly in the book, is given a major role in the film. Played by the British-South African actress Maria Papas, Limpel was a Polish Jew who walked across the Soviet Union to reach Mandatory Palestine, then died at the battle for the Latrun Monastery. ■

Brotherhood in Air Force sukkah

By RABBI GARY DAVIDSON

AN AIR FORCE BASE IN THE PERSIAN GULF (JTA) — Three long, narrow, white boxes with Hebrew and English writing were lying on the chapel floor.

What's this? I wondered aloud. When I looked closer, I noticed the words "Sukkah" and "U.S. Government" stamped on each package.

"A sukkah kit for the Jewish service personnel at our overseas American Air Force base!" I exclaimed. "It's not often one comes across these sorts of things in an Arab country!"

As the sole Jewish chaplain at the base, I eagerly shared the news with the Jewish personnel who serve here. We agreed to meet late Friday afternoon, before Sukkot began, to erect the booth.

Due to busy schedules, only two of us showed up. Determined to get the help I needed, I asked the chapel staff for volunteers. A Catholic chaplain and a Protestant chaplain offered to assist.

The three of us, accompanied by the Jewish airman, picked a spot for the sukkah in front of the chapel.

We felt the location was perfect because the outer chapel walls would protect the sukkah from the high desert winds.

We hastily opened the boxes and pulled out the disassembled, white metal frame, the white-and-navy nylon tarp used for the walls and the reed mat for the roof.

As the Jewish airman read the assembly directions to us, the other chaplains and I interlocked the floor frame, and I used a rubber mallet to hammer the corner wall pieces into the slots of the floor frame.

We stabilized the sukkah with four bungee cords, then stretched the tarp around the perimeter of the structure. Two parallel wooden beams were laid for roof support, and the reed mat was unraveled on top of the beams.

To prevent the schach, as the roof is known, from blowing away, we tied it to

the frame. We completed the project by placing a wooden pallet outside the front door as a makeshift "welcome mat."

The airman, Protestant chaplain, Catholic chaplain and I stepped back, wiped the sweat from our brows and admired our handiwork.

What a beautiful sukkah! And probably the only one in this entire Muslim country.

We first used the sukkah that night. After participating in Shabbat/Sukkot services in the chapel, we walked outside and made kiddush over grape juice and blessed in the sukkah.

Together we recited the blessing "Lashevet b'sukkah," blessing God for commanding us to dwell in the sukkah, and sat down on metal folding chairs.

While feasting on brownies, cookies and pecan pie, we discussed how lucky we were to have such a beautiful sukkah. We

continued to talk throughout the evening until the others excused themselves for bed.

Before leaving the sukkah, I looked through the roof at the stars above.

"How appropriate it is to observe Sukkot in the Middle Eastern desert," I thought.

Being a service member in Operation Iraqi Freedom, I also realized that life, like the sukkah, is temporary. One never knows how long one might live or when one might die.

For this reason, we must truly make the most of each day that God grants us. As the Psalms say, "Teach us to count our days wisely so we may attain a heart of wisdom" (Psalms 90:12).

With this in mind, I stood up to leave the booth.

As I walked out into the warm, moonlit night, I smiled at the thought that Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplains had worked together as brothers-in-arms and friends to build a sukkah. ■

Security precautions prohibit JTA from identifying the air force base where Rabbi Davidson is stationed.

'How appropriate it is to observe Sukkot in the Middle Eastern desert.'

Rabbi Gary Davidson
Chaplain, U.S. Air Force

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Dichter to White House: Egypt must do more

Israel's top security official told the White House that Egypt must do more to stop arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip. Avi Dichter, Israel's internal security minister, met Wednesday with Stephen Hadley, President Bush's national security adviser.

Dichter said he believed Egypt was capable of doing more to stop terrorists from smuggling in arms that are used against Israelis. "I don't think the United States understood the breadth of the smuggling in relationship to the capabilities of the Egyptians to stop it," Dichter told reporters after meeting with Hadley.

Dichter also met with his U.S. counterpart, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

WORLD

Spielberg vs. Holocaust deniers

Steven Spielberg said he produced a new Holocaust film to counter those who deny the Nazi genocide.

The famed Hollywood director was in Kiev on Thursday for the premiere of "Spell Your Name," a film he produced about Holocaust survivors in Ukraine.

"In order to create an undeniability about the Holocaust, these survivors, 52,000 of them, need to be shown to students all over the world," he said at a news conference.

"Tolerance is born of education."

Spielberg, whose grandparents came from Ukraine, took time out during his visit to see Babı Yar, where the Nazis slaughtered more than 33,000 Jews in 1941. But he described the trip as a homecoming of sorts.

"I was brought up in a home where grandparents only spoke Russian and Yiddish," he said.

"I kind of felt I had a piece of Ukraine in my own home."

Israel earns rare U.N. commendation

The lead article on the Web site of the U.N. AIDS agency praised Israel.

The article, titled "Israel – HIV Education in a Multicultural Society," celebrates the work of the Jerusalem AIDS Project, an Israeli group promoting health and prevention education for youth and training for health care professionals.

UNAIDS hails the project as "best practice" emulated in 27 other countries, and notes its success in reaching out to various segments of Israeli society.

Norwegian neo-Nazi convicted

A neo-Nazi leader in Norway was convicted of making anti-Semitic statements.

Tore Tvedt, founder of the group known as Vigrid, was given a 45-day suspended sentence Tuesday.

The court found that Tvedt's 2003 comments, in which he called Jews "evil murderers" and said "they are not people, they are parasites that must be wiped out," violated the country's anti-racism law.

Looted art now online

An initial list of Nazi-looted art in Austrian collections is now online.

The Claims Conference announced Thursday that the database, which is not yet complete, covers items in museum and public collections.

The database lists 7,500 works, each with information on its restitution status.

It was established by the Austrian National Fund, a state institution that helps with restitution of Austrian Jewish victims of the Nazis.

The German site is at www.kunstrestitution.at; the English version is scheduled to be up in 2007.

NORTH AMERICA

Canadian leader vows Israel support

Canada's prime minister pledged that his country would not bow to pressure to become neutral in Israel's fight against terrorism.

In what is believed to be his first speech to the Jewish community since being elected prime minister, Stephen Harper pledged at a B'nai Brith Canada dinner Wednesday to support Israel's fight against terrorism.

"When it comes to dealing with a war between Israel and a terrorist organization, this country and this government cannot and will never be neutral," Harper said.

Harper's comments came as his Conservative Party is seen to be picking up increased Jewish backing after one of the candidates for the Liberal Party leadership labeled Israel's bombing of a Lebanese village this summer a war crime.

Rabbi helps Democrats with religion

A leading U.S. Reform rabbi is one of a dozen activists helping Democrats to "get religion."

Religion News Service this week listed Rabbi David Saperstein, director of Reform's Religious Action Center in Washington, as one of the "Democratic Dozen," a group it describes as "a new generation of activists, strategists and scribes — some Democrats, some not — helping the party to build relationships in the religious community, talk openly about spiritual journeys, and frame policies and platforms using moral terms."

Calling Saperstein "the prophet" among the dozen, the article says "he is sought out by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle who ask him to explain a biblical text, or to provide a Jewish approach to contentious issues."

Americans split on Israel lobby role

Americans are split on the role of the pro-Israel lobby in guiding Bush administration policy on Iraq and Iran, a poll showed.

Asked whether "the work of the Israel lobby on Congress and the Bush administration has been a key factor for going to war in Iraq and now confronting Iran," 39 percent of respondents "agreed" or "somewhat agreed," while 40 percent "strongly disagreed" or "somewhat disagreed," according to the poll carried out by Zogby International for the Council for the National Interest.

The council is an advocacy group that has made its allegations of Israel's role in Iraq central to its arguments for cuts in U.S. funding to Israel.

Some 1,036 likely voters throughout the country participated in the poll, conducted Oct. 10-12. The study's margin of error was plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Rabbi joins anti-torture protest

A leading U.S. rabbi in the anti-torture movement spoke at a White House protest.

Rabbi Gerald Serotta of Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, Md., spoke at the rally Tuesday, which drew about 200 people.

Serotta is prominent in Rabbis for Human Rights and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

The protest targeted recent legislation that gives the president considerable leeway in defining torture.