

IN THE NEWS
Ex-Iran leader wanted in AMIA case

Prosecutors in Argentina asked a judge to order the arrest of a former Iranian president and seven others in connection with the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center.

Prosecutors said at a news conference Wednesday that the decision to call for the arrest of Hashemi Rafsanjani was made because the decision to attack the AMIA center, which they said was carried out by Hezbollah, was made with the knowledge of top Iranian authorities. Iran has denied any involvement in the July 18, 1994, attack, which killed 85 people and wounded an estimated 300.

The report "makes clear yet again that Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism," said the president of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman.

Jews split on gay marriage ruling

U.S. Jewish opponents and supporters of gay marriage each declared a measure of victory after the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered the legislature to consider the issue.

Wednesday's 4-3 ruling returned the matter to the legislature to decide within six months how gay partnerships should be recognized. "While today's ruling is an important victory for gay and lesbian Americans, we are also hopeful that the legislature will ensure all couples the right to civil marriage, rather than simply the rights and privileges thereof," said a statement from Rabbi Randi Musnitsky, regional director for Reform's New Jersey/West Hudson Valley Council.

The Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox group, welcomed what it called the court's "refusal" to recognize gay marriages, but also "expressed deep disappointment in the court's interpretation of the state constitution as requiring some formal recognition of such relationships."

WORLD REPORT

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UJC's annual gathering shifts agenda to focus primarily on Israel

By JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — The North American federation system has shifted the focus of its annual gathering to a decidedly Israel-centric platform.

When the convention, slated for Nov. 12-15 in Los Angeles, was originally planned, the United Jewish Communities intended to play off its Hollywood setting with the theme, "Be With the Stars," highlighting major federation contributors and exceptional professionals, according to UJC's treasurer and incoming chairwoman of its executive committee, Kathy Manning.

But after Israel's war with Hezbollah started in July and the federation system raised some \$320 million to help build Israel's northern region, the UJC decided to put Israel at the forefront and changed the theme of the General Assembly to "One People, One Destiny."

UJC uses plenary meetings and smaller breakout sessions at the gathering, which draws between 3,000 and 5,000 professionals and lay leaders to a different location each year, to pump up issues it feels the federations should pursue during the following year.

The convention, known as the G.A., will be heavily dotted with appearances by top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Israel's prime minister is annually invited to address the General Assembly, but none has done so in person in the United States since Ehud Barak came in 2000.

Olmert's presence this year is "extremely important" in demonstrating UJC and the federation system's practical and metaphor-

ic closeness with Israel, the UJC's president and chief executive officer, Howard Rieger, said.

Israel's foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, and the Likud opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, are also scheduled to address the delegates.

After the revamping, which started in August, all but one of the plenary sessions will focus on Israel. And even the one non-Israel plenary, a panel discussion about the future of Judaism with the heads of the main seminaries of the Reform, Conservative and modern Orthodox movements, will still involve some questions about Israel, according to Michael Kotzin, the executive vice president of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

Kotzin, who was brought in by UJC to oversee the overhaul, said that about half the breakout sessions will also deal with Israel, with topics ranging from postwar Israel to the federation system and Israeli Arabs to the rise of radical Islam to "Fighting the Hezbollah Terror Army."

"The G.A. is about being together and fostering a sense of community, and the major events of recent months center around what happened in Israel," said Doron Krakow, the UJC's senior vice president for Israel and overseas.

"We are raising consciousness on an intellectual level, and fostering the delegates' sense of being in touch with what we see as our defining work. This will also serve as the context for the remainder of our work."

Though the General Assembly is not typically a fund-raising event, the group

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■ After the Hezbollah conflict, the federation's General Assembly will focus on Israel

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is considering including a fund-raising component this time around.

"You can certainly say that there has been conversation about ways to appropriately include fund raising, but that is not on the schedule yet," Kotzin said.

The Israel Emergency Campaign most likely saw its biggest spike during the war, Krakow said, adding that he does not anticipate another spike after the G.A., as most local federations start their annual general campaigns. Though the emergency campaign has no official dollar goal, officials have said that it could take about \$500 million of American money to meet the requests of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel and Israel's government.

But UJC officials say they see this G.A. as a way to seize on the central issue facing the Jewish people now. Though the war happened in Israel, its ramifications extend well beyond the boundaries of the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, extending to concerns about the Jews' global security and the continuity of the Jewish people, Rieger told JTA.

The content switch did spark some debate within the UJC's lay world, because "there were people who felt that where we were headed was going to be great," but in the end the switch was deemed necessary, Rieger said.

Seizing a central issue is something that Rieger admits that some of the gatherings in the recent past, which some say fell flat, have been unable to do.

Rieger said UJC will focus on its success in mobilizing and raising money for Israel through its Israel Emergency Campaign in recent months and on trying to figure out how to take that model and replicate it for dealing with other issues.

The change in agenda was publicly supported by those involved with the social welfare, social action and Jewish renewal arms of the federation system with whom

JTA spoke, such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and JESNA, the educational group, even if it might steal some thunder from their projects. The Jewish

Council has been heavily involved in the Save Darfur movement and JESNA focuses on the continuing challenges in Jewish education. Those topics are still on the docket, as are sessions about emerging philanthropy, developing leadership and Ethiopian Jewry.

"The fact is that UJC and the federation system need to be responsive to the way the world looks, and to have an agenda written a year ago would have been less

interesting and relevant," said William Daroff, director of the UJC's Washington office, which deals with advocacy and policy issues. ■

Though the General Assembly is not typically a fund-raising event, the group is considering including a fund-raising component this time around.

British Jews, Muslims oppose school bill

LONDON (JTA) — Jews and Muslims in Britain often are at odds on issues of civil liberties and terrorism, but they're united in opposing a bill that would require faith-based private schools to admit 25 percent of students from outside the main faith.

As the bill was debated last week in the House of Lords, Jewish leaders were joined in their opposition to the bill by Catholic, Sikh and Hindu leaders, as well as Muslims.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews last Friday announced the launch of a united "community voice" campaign to oppose the bill, in conjunction with other faith groups.

The coordinated response comes after Education Secretary Alan Johnson said the government would back an amendment to the Education Bill giving local authorities the option of requiring new faith schools to give 25 percent of places to pupils from other faiths. At an Oct. 18 news conference, Johnson included existing as well as new faith schools, saying that even existing schools "must do more to defuse community tensions."

Johnson's support was an attempt to tackle criticism that the ruling Labor Party's expansion of faith schools will lead to segregation. ■

The only religious community supporting the bill so far has been the Church of England, leading to questions about whether or not the bill would achieve its goal of integration. According to the Board of Deputies, there are only 40 Jewish schools, as compared with 4,000 Church of England schools and 2,500 Roman Catholic schools.

Some members of Britain's Jewish community fear the bill would signal the end of the Jewish day school system.

"The consequences of Lord Baker's amendment would be to exclude Jewish students from Jewish day schools," said Jon Benjamin, chief executive of the board. "This would frustrate parental choice."

The Jewish community has noted the success of its education system, which has some of the country's highest educational achievement and teaches about diversity and inclusion.

Simon Goulden, chief executive of the United Synagogue's Agency for Jewish Education, said, "We firmly believe that Jewish schools encourage communal harmony, active citizenship, social responsibility, a sense of national belonging and mutual respect."

The bill is expected to go back to the House of Commons for another reading Oct. 30. ■



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The \$228 million question

By DINA KRAFT

ACRE, Israel (JTA) — Salwa Zawawi's tiny sewing shop in Acre's Old City virtually shut down during Israel's monthlong war with Hezbollah this summer as Katyusha rockets fell on the city.

It wasn't clear whether Zawawi's business would survive. But a grant of about \$930 from the Jewish Agency for Israel has helped her cover rent, buy fabric and keep the doors open.

"The money came just in time," said her son, Fuad Zawawi.

The grant was one of about 1,000 that JAFI gave to small-business owners in the North. The money was drawn from the \$320 million raised during and after the war as part of the United Jewish Communities' Israel Emergency Campaign.

About \$92 million was distributed through UJC's partners in Israel, JAFI and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, during the war and immediately afterward.

How are the remaining \$228 million being spent? The Jewish Agency's Board of Governors met in Jerusalem earlier this week, its first gathering since the war, in large part to address that question.

"We're here to see what's happening after the war," Jane Sherman, co-chairwoman of the agency's Israel department, said as she toured Acre with a group of fellow board members. Sherman's department is overseeing the postwar expenditures.

JAFI will distribute grants and longer-term loans of up to \$75,000 to small businesses in the North, accompanied by consultations on business plans.

Such assistance "helps encourage people to stay in the region," Sherman said.

Reaching out to small businesses is a way of securing the regional economy as a whole, said Ofer Isseroff, JAFI's director of finance and human resources.

"We know on average each small business supports four families," he said. "The collapse of small businesses is like a snowball. It affects the entire economy."

Small businesses were among the hardest hit sectors during the war. Many closed for the entire month of the war, with no money coming in, yet their bills

and overhead remained. While larger businesses probably could absorb that kind of loss, it was not so clear small ones could.

Shmuel Miron, owner of an electronics repair store in Acre, also received a grant from JAFI.

"As someone who comes from the world of small business, I know that we can often get lost in the shuffle," said

the Romanian-born Miron, 63, who immigrated to Israel as a teenager. "Some people can fall between the cracks."

During the war, JAFI provided funds to place air conditioning units in bomb shelters and send about 25,000 children from the North to summer camps in the center of the country.

Postwar projects also include education, including \$1,000 scholarships for students in the North. Adding another incentive to study in the North — northern colleges suffered a 60 percent dip in registration this fall — JAFI is giving \$1,000 scholarships to Israelis who served in the army during the war.

Fostering regional pride also is on the postwar agenda: There are plans for

a program to take schoolchildren on field trips around the North and teach them its history.

Increasing the Jewish population in the Galilee and investing in its development has been a long-term goal of the Israeli government, which is wary of the current demographic situation there. A little more than half of the Galilee population is Arab.

Other informal education projects would bring volunteer tutors into after-school programs. Educational enrichment programs for immigrant children also would be a focus.

"This is a rare opportunity to make changes in the North," Sherman said.

The remaining \$210 million from the emergency fund is expected to go toward trauma counseling for children and to repair hospitals, schools and JAFI-owned buildings damaged by the war.

Doug Seserman, president and CEO of the Allied Federation of Colorado, walked through the narrow stone alleyways of Acre's Old City, hearing stories of the war.

"My objective is to see the situation on the ground," he said. "The war ended. The rebuilding is just beginning." ■

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

'The collapse of small businesses is like a snowball. It affects the entire economy.'

Ofer Isseroff
Finance director, JAFI

Holocaust activist Benjamin Meed dies

NEW YORK (JTA) — Benjamin Meed, who was a key figure in spreading awareness of the Holocaust in the United States, died Tuesday in New York at age 88 after a long illness.

A survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, Meed planned the World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in 1981 in Israel and established the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants, also in 1981.

Meed was a leader in turning Holocaust commemorations, which long had attracted mainly survivors and their families, into citywide and communitywide events. Along with his wife, Vladka, he helped set up one of the first Holocaust teacher-training programs in New York.

Meed also served on the advisory board of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, which recommended establishing the Holocaust museum, and served on the memorial's governing council from 1980 to 2004.

Along with Sigmund Strochlitz — who died earlier this month at age 89 in Connecticut — and others, Meed was instrumental in establishing the Days of Remembrance, the Holocaust commemoration observed annually in the Capitol Rotunda.

The Meeds also helped establish a registry of Jewish Holocaust victims that united survivors and their families. The registry is now part of the museum.

Funeral services will be Friday morning at the Park East Synagogue in Manhattan. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Germany complains about Israeli fire

Germany accused the Israeli air force of firing near one of its navy ships off the coast of Lebanon.

Germany's Defense Ministry on Wednesday confirmed a local newspaper report that two Israeli warplanes fired twice while flying over a German vessel enforcing a blockade on arms reaching Hezbollah. The F-16 jets also were alleged to have deployed anti-missile flares.

The incident, which some reports said occurred Oct. 16, seemed likely to boost international pressure on Israel to stop overflights in Lebanon. Israel's military said there was no such incident. Officials said jets were scrambled when a helicopter took off from a German aircraft carrier near Israeli waters without identifying itself, but returned home when the mistake was cleared up.

Ukrainian leader vows to fight anti-Semitism

Ukraine's prime minister pledged the authorities' assistance in dealing with anti-Semitism in Ukraine.

Viktor Yanukovich made the pledge at an Oct. 18 meeting with a group of rabbis representing the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, a Chabad-led umbrella organization.

He also said his government favored the development of Jewish communal and religious institutions in the country.

The rabbis also discussed with Yanukovich the issue of restitution of Jewish communal property and the prospects of opening a new Jewish community center in Kiev.

NORTH AMERICA

Dodd: U.S. wrong to urge Palestinian vote

The Bush administration was mistaken in urging elections in the Palestinian Authority, Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) said. "In Iraq, in Lebanon and in the Palestinian Authority, I believe America made the mistake of urging elections before there was anything worth voting for," Dodd told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual summit in Houston on Monday.

"Our plan for democratization was like an upside-down plant: fruit first, roots later — if ever." Dodd also said it will be a long time before Palestinians are ready for peace.

He joined Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who also addressed the conference, in urging final passage before the year is out of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act, which would isolate the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

U.S. lawmaker chides Carter on 'apartheid'

A leading U.S. black congressman called former President Carter to chide him for titling his new book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid."

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) said the use of apartheid in the title "does not serve the cause of peace and the use of it against the Jewish people in particular, who have been victims of the worst kind of discrimination, discrimination resulting in death, is offensive and wrong."

In his statement Tuesday, Conyers said he called Carter "to express my concerns about the title of the book, and to request that the title be changed." Carter's book is due to be published next month.

AIPAC condemns Republicans for 'loyalty' jibe

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee condemned Republican activists who said failure to support their candidate amounted

to "disloyalty" to Israel. Jonathan and Irit Tratt earned boos and walkouts at an event last week in Scottsdale, Ariz., when they spoke on behalf of U.S. Rep. J.D. Hayworth, who is fighting a tough challenge from Democrat Harry Mitchell, the mayor of Tempe.

The Tratts faced questions about Hayworth's endorsement of the late Henry Ford's writings on "Americanization" of immigrants, which included anti-Semitic passages.

According to news accounts, Jonathan Tratt told the audience that because Hayworth was a steadfast Israel supporter, such questions showed "disloyalty" to the Jewish state.

He also said Hayworth, a regular churchgoer, was a "more observant Jew" than those in attendance because he opposed abortion.

As audience members walked out in disgust, Irit Tratt reportedly remarked "no wonder there are anti-Semites."

Speaking on behalf of AIPAC, board member and Phoenix resident Gene Schupak said the organization "unequivocally condemns the Tratts' statements.

Their actions were repugnant and they in no way speak for or represent the views of our organization."

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon nominated for Israel Prize

Ariel Sharon was nominated for the Israel Prize. Yoel Hasson, a lawmaker with the governing Kadima Party, appealed this week to the Israel Prize Committee to honor the comatose former prime minister at next year's awards ceremony.

Hasson proposed that Sharon win the Israel Prize for lifetime achievement, noting his service to the country both as a military commander and statesman.

The nomination was opposed by Zvi Hendel of the right-wing National Union Party, who noted Sharon's role in masterminding last year's Gaza Strip withdrawal — a move many Israelis believe undermined national security.

Israel Prizes in various categories are handed out during Israel's Independence Day in the spring.

Israeli illegals arrested in Egypt

Two Israelis were arrested in Egypt on charges of illegally crossing the border.

The two men were questioned by Egyptian authorities Wednesday after being caught near Taba, a town just south of Eilat.

They apparently had walked across, circumventing the border terminal.

Israel declares social action month

Israeli and Diaspora leaders declared a Jewish month for social action. A special Knesset session attended by Cabinet ministers and several senior lawmakers was held Tuesday to launch Jewish Social Action Month in Cheshvan, which falls between Oct. 24 and Nov. 21 this year.

The initiative was fostered by KolDor, a global network of young Jewish activists that helps runs the Web sites koldor.org, socialaction.com and cheshvan.org. Because no Jewish holidays occur during Cheshvan, it traditionally has been seen as a month of sadness.

KolDor's proposal is that Cheshvan instead be a time of tikkun olam — repairing the world — and brotherly love. According to the group, as part of the campaign the UJA-Federation of New York is funding community service and social action projects that include joint youth projects in New York, Israel and Ukraine, creating a wild-life habitat in Long Island and an internship program for teens at the Bukharan Jewish Museum in Queens.