



IN THE NEWS

Egypt boosts Gaza border garrison

Egypt significantly boosted its border police garrison south of the Gaza Strip. Five thousand new troops joined some 750 already stationed on the Egypt-Gaza border on Saturday in what Cairo officials called a response to Israeli threats of military action against Palestinian arms smuggling there.

Israel had previously opposed the idea of Egypt stepping up its armed presence along the frontier, saying this could undermine clauses in the 1979 Camp David Peace Accord that require the Sinai be demilitarized. Israel has complained of rampant smuggling of advanced weaponry for Egypt into Gaza via tunnels, and said it could be forced to retake the entire border area.

Iran enriching more uranium

Iran launched a second uranium-enrichment facility.

Last Friday's announcement, through the semi-official Iranian Students News Agency, comes as world powers are pondering whether to sanction Iran for a nuclear program that international inspectors believe is a precursor for manufacturing weapons.

Foundation funds day school scholarships

A U.S. foundation will offer scholarships worth \$11 million for students to attend Jewish day schools in Baltimore. The multiyear grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation will be managed by the Associated, Baltimore's Jewish federation.

The Associated, which already provides more than \$3 million a year to Jewish schools in the Baltimore area, committed an additional \$1 million for each year of the partnership. Studies have shown that many Jewish parents say they are unable to send their children to Jewish schools because of the cost.

WORLD REPORT

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Reform temples in U.S. finding interest growing in kashrut

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Last November, at the Union for Reform Judaism's biennial in Houston, a group of rabbis and lay leaders gathered for a workshop to discuss how Reform Jews should relate to the theory and laws of keeping kosher.

"The room was full," says Rabbi Bennett Miller of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick, N.J., one of three panelists.

While some in the room felt Reform Jews shouldn't even be discussing such a thing, "others were saying, 'There are many of us trying to take kashrut seriously, and we wish we had guidelines.'"

Some day soon, those guidelines may exist.

Miller is the immediate past chairman of a six-year-old Reform rabbinic task force on kashrut, which is trying "to come up with a philosophy or theology of kashrut, including various options from eco-kashrut to traditional kashrut to vegetarianism."

The union's department of worship, music and religious living has been fielding increasing numbers of phone calls from Reform congregations interested in making their kitchens kosher, department director Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman says. Her department is developing a study guide to help them, which should be available next year.

A handful of Reform rabbis are talking about creating a Reform board of kashrut, which would certify foods as "fit to eat" according to ethical and political, as well as biblical and rabbinic, considerations.

Such conversations never would have

happened 10 years ago. In fact, it was the movement's 1999 Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism that opened the doors to serious discussion of mikvah, kashrut and other traditional rituals widely eschewed by the Reform movement since its emergence.

Interest in Jewish text study and traditional practices has been growing in Reform circles. Adult education classes are proliferating, attendance is up for day schools and religious schools, and head coverings and prayer shawls are the norm rather than the exception at many Reform synagogues.

According to two recent studies, more Reform Jews are putting their mouths where their values are. In a 2000 survey that was never published, 344 congregations — about half the movement's affiliates — showed a surprising adherence to kosher laws.

Ten percent reported that their synagogues have kosher kitchens, 80 percent ban pork or shellfish, and nearly half won't serve milk and meat on the same plate or platter.

"The majority of our congregations keep some elements of kashrut, and that's very interesting," Wasserman says. "It represents a change over time."

Wasserman wasn't surprised at the ban on pork or shellfish. That's "deeply culturally" ingrained in many Jews, she says, who may eat nonkosher food in restaurants and even bring it into their homes, but expect higher dietary standards in Jewish communal settings.

But separating milk and meat, she says, is "going to another level that I didn't expect to see 46 percent of our congregations going to."

Another survey conducted last November at the movement's biennial revealed that in-

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ Reform is weighing kashrut standards that may add a layer of ethics to halachah

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dividual Reform Jews are becoming more kosher-friendly.

More than 500 conference participants, about one-quarter of the total, answered online questions about their dietary practice. At home, 62 percent say they ban pork, 46 percent ban shellfish and 35 percent don't mix meat and milk. In restaurants, however, just 51 percent avoid pork, 34 percent won't order shellfish and 29 percent stay away from dishes that mix milk and meat, such as cheeseburgers.

Some 38 percent said they eat vegetarian in restaurants, compared to 28 percent who do so at home, reflecting a significant number of Reform Jews who presumably are avoiding kosher questions entirely by avoiding meat when eating out.

The survey, which has not yet been published, asked about dietary practice rather than kashrut. It included actions such as eating matzah at Passover — nearly 71 percent said yes — and saying motzi, the blessing over bread — 48 percent do it on Shabbat — that Wasserman explains are expressions of Jewish identity that would be lost in a survey only on kashrut.

"The connection of the table to something holy and sacred, the notion that what we eat is connected to an expression of being Jewish that is appropriate in a Reform Jewish context, is bubbling up within the movement," she says.

Rabbi Menachem Genack, head of the Orthodox Union's kashrut division,

says the group is "very happy to see" Reform Jews keeping kosher, but adds that changing the definition of what's kosher shouldn't be on the table.

Setting up your own standards "is too amorphous," Genack says. "It's very subjective — people can agree or disagree philosophically."

The emerging Reform notions of dietary practice encompass much more than traditional kashrut. The growing Reform interest in the totality of the concept is evidence of how the term is expanding.

Eco-kashrut is increasingly popular, with 43 percent of respondents to the November survey saying they "refrain from eating foods" they feel "are ethically questionable."

That includes people who keep kosher; "moral vegetarians," who may avoid Chilean sea bass because of over-fishing or foie gras because of force-feeding; those who support organic or local farmers; consumers of Fair Trade coffee; avoiders of non-union fruit; and a host of others who adhere to certain ecological or political standards that may have nothing to do with traditional notions of kashrut.

Debbie Cohn of Highland Park, N.J., is on the board of Anshe Emeth. She and her husband began keeping kosher 18 years ago, soon after their first daughter was born, though neither had grown up with the practice.

Cohn says her congregation has made changes to accommodate people's evolving stances: Nondairy creamer is always available after meat meals, she points out, and at this year's Purim carnival, which used to serve hot dogs along with pizza, only pizza was served.

Some older congregants objected, she says. The changes were spearheaded "by our younger members, who are returning to traditional things."

Rabbi Lucy Dinner, who has been at Temple Beth Or in Raleigh, N.C., for 15 years, says the conversation changed

10 years ago. Now her synagogue holds meals where they serve free-range chicken, "and we let people know when and why we're doing it."

They've brought in the local Chabad rabbi to kasher, or make kosher, their kitchen when they hold events for the entire Jewish community, yet they also respect members who don't keep kosher.

Some rabbis on the Reform kashrut task force are talking about having the movement set up its own kosher board, which would certify foods according to yet-undetermined Reform

standards. That would give Reform Jews a framework to develop their own approaches to kashrut.

They were motivated in part by a recent scandal in kosher slaughterhouses, which flashed scenes of animal cruelty around the Jewish world. Those Reform Jews who want to keep kosher but are appalled by conditions in some kosher slaughterhouses "feel our hands are tied because we have no place else to go," Wasserman says.

Rabbi Richard Levy, director of the School of Rabbinic Studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, promotes the idea of Reform kosher certification. He says it actually would be more stringent than traditional kosher laws because ethical considerations would be added to existing dietary prohibitions.

"I would like to see it as an extension of halachah," or Jewish law, he says. "It would expand what dietary practice means in a Jewish setting to include a concern for the people who harvest our food, bring it to market and sell it, a concern with the pain of living creatures, which has led people not to eat veal or foie gras, to look for free-range poultry and beef, or more humane methods of slaughter."

Levy thinks such a system could emerge in the next decade.

"It's not a pipe dream," he insists. ■

The notion that what we eat is connected to an expression of being Jewish that is appropriate in a Reform Jewish context, is bubbling up within the movement.

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman
Union for Reform Judaism



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Jews are key in South Florida vote

By LARRY LUXNER

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (JTA) — There are two rabbis at Temple Beth El, the conservative shul in West Palm Beach where Lois Frankel prays: Democrat David Westman and Republican Leonid Feldman.

As a Jew, she likes them both. But politically, she agrees with only Westman.

Frankel, the mayor of West Palm Beach, is confident that fellow Floridian Jews will vote overwhelmingly for her party in the Nov. 7 midterm elections.

She cited unhappiness with the Iraq war, property taxes, the high cost of prescription drugs, education and the rising cost of homeowners insurance as election season issues favoring Democrats.

"The trend here is just like the rest of the country," Frankel said. "Here in South Florida, most of our Jewish population is older retirees from the Northeast, and they traditionally vote Democratic."

Sid Dinerstein believes that will change.

"Pretty soon, virtually every Jewish person will vote Republican," claimed the

chairman of the Republican Party of Palm Beach and a member of the Republican Jewish Coalition. "The anti-Semitism that has been allowed to gain a foothold in the Democratic Party will eventually scare the Jews to vote Republican."

The RJC is currently running two full-page advertisements in the Broward Jewish Journal.

One ad, dominated by a large photograph of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, thanks Rep. E. Clay Shaw Jr. for "standing up for Israel." It urges voters to support the veteran Republican in his campaign against Democratic Jewish challenger Ron Klein for control of Florida's 22nd Congressional District, which includes parts of Broward and Palm Beach counties.

The second ad, showing a bombed-out Israeli apartment building, warns in large type: "Two senior Democratic congressmen voted against supporting Israel in its war against Hezbollah."

The two, Michigan lawmakers John Conyers and John Dingell, objected to a nonbinding resolution that did not include appeals to all sides to safeguard civilian life. Democrats otherwise overwhelmingly backed the resolution.

The ad notes that Dingell and Conyers are poised to become powerful committee chairmen if the Democrats control Congress. "The Democratic Party is changing. And the far left, anti-Israel segment is gaining control. It's time to ask yourself: Does the Democratic Party still represent you?"

For most South Florida Jews, says demographer Ira Sheskin, the answer remains a resounding yes.

"I have no doubt that the percentage of Jews identifying themselves as Republicans has increased, but the reality is that we still don't have a very large percentage of Jews identifying themselves as such," said Sheskin, director of the Jewish Demography Project at the University of

Miami's Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies.

Nationally, 14 percent of American Jewish voters say they're Republicans, compared to 61 percent who claim to be Democrats and 20 percent who identify as independents.

Voting breakdowns are not available for South Florida Jews, but Sheskin says that the demography would suggest even greater support for Democrats.

"Half of the Jews in South Florida are 65 years or older, and they tend to be liberal Democrats," he told JTA.

According to studies supervised by Sheskin, just more than 600,000 Jews live in the three counties that make up Florida's southeastern corridor.

Florida boasts two Jews, both Democrats, in the U.S. House of Representatives, and

another two Jewish Democrats are campaigning for House seats for the first time.

One is Klein, a lawyer who rose to Florida Senate minority leader during his 14 years in that body. The other is Hillsborough County Commissioner Phyllis Busansky, who will face off against Gus Bilirakis, the son of retiring incumbent Mike Bilirakis, for control of the 9th Congressional District in the Tampa Bay area.

Polls show Klein within striking distance of Shaw, while Busansky has only an outside chance.

The only Jews in South Florida who are likely to vote Republican this year as a bloc are Orthodox Jews and those of Cuban origin, Sheskin said.

The problem for local Republicans is that there just aren't that many Orthodox or Cuban Jews down here.

In Miami-Dade County, 9 percent of Jews consider themselves Orthodox; in Broward, that drops to 4 percent, and in Palm Beach, 3 percent. And although Miami-Dade is home to 9,500 Hispanic Jewish adults, only 29 percent of them are of Cuban origin, Sheskin said. ■

U.S.
ELECTIONS
2006

'Half of the Jews in South Florida are 65 years or older, and they tend to be liberal Democrats.'

Ira Sheskin

Demographer, University of Miami

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

- The National Council on U.S. Arab Relations holds its annual conference in Washington. The topic this year is U.S.-Saudi relations and the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

- The Endowment for Middle East Truth, a think tank, screens "Suicide Killers," a documentary on Palestinian suicide attackers, on Capitol Hill.

TUESDAY

- Daniel Ayalon holds his last news briefing after four years as Israeli ambassador to the United States. He is to be replaced by Sallai Meridor.

WEDNESDAY

- Kenneth Pollack, a Clinton administration member of the National Security Council, discusses U.S. options at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington.

- Boston's Jewish Film Festival runs through Nov. 12 in Boston and Brookline with 40 screenings of Jewish feature films and documentaries.

THURSDAY

- The American Enterprise Institute hosts a daylong conference on "Dissent and Reform in the Arab World."

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Katsav urged to temporarily quit

Israel's attorney general recommended that President Moshe Katsav temporarily resign.

Attorney General Menachem Mazuz issued his advisory Sunday in response to a High Court petition lodged by a lawyer who wants Katsav to resign in light of the rape allegations against him. Mazuz noted that the High Court is not the forum for deciding Katsav's fate, but said the president should consider having the Knesset declare him "temporarily incapacitated" until the investigation against him runs its course.

Mazuz, who holds ultimate responsibility on deciding whether to prosecute Katsav, said that should there be a trial the president would have no choice but to step down.

Katsav, who is accused of raping more than one former female employee, has denied wrongdoing.

Livni scraps Qatar visit

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni canceled her expected trip to Qatar.

Livni's office said Sunday that she had decided against attending this week's U.N. democracy conference in the Gulf Arab state after learning that two Palestinian Authority lawmakers from Hamas would be there.

A more junior Foreign Ministry official will fly out instead. Israel and Qatar have maintained low-level ties for more than a decade.

Had Livni attended the conference, she would have been the most senior Israeli official to visit Qatar since then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres opened a trade mission there in 1996.

High Court approves fence extension

Israel's Supreme Court approved an extension of Israel's security barrier to encompass some West Bank settlements.

The court ruled Oct. 26 that the northern West Bank settlements — Emanuel, Ma'aleh Shomron and Karnei Shomron — merited the barrier because they had been "targets of harsh terror attacks over recent years."

Palestinians had petitioned against that sector of the barrier, one of two that dip deeper into the West Bank, saying it would cut them off from their fields.

The court said it would hear further appeals.

Israel accused of 'uranium bomb' use

Israel was accused of using "uranium bombs" during the Lebanon war. On Saturday, The Independent newspaper in Britain ran an expose alleging that two bomb sites in southern Lebanon were found to have elevated levels of radiation, suggesting that they were caused either by small, innovative nuclear fission devices or "bunker-buster" bombs using enriched uranium tips.

The latter would be a departure from the use of depleted uranium in munitions, which is standard in many militaries.

Israeli officials declined comment on the report other than to reiterate that all arms and tactics employed against Hezbollah during the 34-day war fell within the framework of international law.

Wiesel doesn't want Israeli presidency

Elie Wiesel said he was not interested in becoming Israel's president. "I don't want to be president.

"I never planned to be president and I will not be president," Yehudit Achronot quoted the Nobel laureate as saying over the weekend in response to reports that he has been named as a possible successor to the embattled President Moshe Katsav.

"I teach in a university, I have students, I write books, and that's it. That's enough.

"As president I would not be able to voice myself freely — and words are all I have," he said.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. wants to ban Iranian physicists

An American draft resolution at the United Nations calls for a ban on Iranians studying subjects related to nuclear development.

The resolution, a copy of which was obtained this week by JTA, would require countries to prohibit Iranians from studying physics and other subjects that could be used to advance the country's nuclear program.

Britain, France and Germany presented Russia and China with the draft Wednesday.

It also calls for a ban on financial or technical assistance for Iran's nuclear activities.

Atlanta arsonist targeted Jews

An Atlanta man convicted in an arson case targeted one building because of its Jewish residents.

Christopher Mock was sentenced Oct. 26 to 20 years in prison on 14 arson counts.

Mock, a cab driver when he set the fires in apartment buildings in autumn 2004, targeted one building because he did not like Jews and another because he did not like Georgia Tech students, prosecutors said.

Mock formerly was a police officer.

Arizona lawmaker sorry for e-mail

A state representative in Arizona apologized for forwarding an anti-Semitic e-mail.

Russell Pearce, a Republican, said he had not read the e-mail, which attacks multiculturalism and says the media is Jewish-controlled, the East Valley Tribune in Arizona reported.

White supremacists have reportedly been cheering Pearce's move on the Internet, the paper reported.

Pearce, who is running for re-election, earlier angered Hispanic groups when he called for the reinstatement of a 1950s-era federal deportation program known as Operation Wetback.

Berkowitz gets bar mitzvah photos

"Son of Sam" got back his bar mitzvah photos. David Berkowitz, a serial killer who terrorized New Yorkers in 1976 and 1977, had given his personal effects to his former lawyer, Hugo Hartz, for safekeeping.

Berkowitz sued Hartz in 2005 when he found out he was going to use the materials, including Berkowitz's bar mitzvah photos, in a book.

As part of the deal revealed Oct. 26, Hartz agreed to return the items and turn profits from the book over to the Crime Victims Board.

Berkowitz converted to Christianity in prison.

WORLD

Jewish woman is European beauty queen

Europe's new beauty queen is Jewish. Alexandra Rosenfeld, 19, won the Miss Europe 2006 title in Kiev last Friday.

Rosenfeld, a student who is also Miss France, walked away with \$130,000 in prize money and a diamond-studded crown.

According to media reports, the Web sites covering the pageant were flooded with anti-Semitic messages after Rosenfeld's win.