

IN THE NEWS

Livni seeks diplomatic initiative

Israel's foreign minister called for a new diplomatic initiative to seek peace with the Palestinians.

Tzipi Livni, who was last week quoted as rejecting an Israeli-Palestinian peace proposal drafted by Spain and France, said Sunday that it was up to Jerusalem to break the deadlock.

"It has to be understood there will not be a political vacuum in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But from my perspective, surrendering to initiatives has to be translated by us to Israeli activity and an Israeli initiative, and not because we are playing some kind of game of who is initiating," she told reporters Sunday.

Israeli minister: Kill Hamas leaders

An Israeli Cabinet minister called for Hamas political leaders to be killed.

Avigdor Lieberman, a rightist who was recently made Israel's strategic affairs minister, said in an interview Saturday that the leadership of Hamas, which runs the Palestinian Authority government, should be "cleared out, sent to heaven" in response to rocket fire from the Gaza Strip.

Speaking on Israel Radio, Lieberman also said P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas is "irrelevant."

Arkady Gaydamak for prime minister?

A controversial Russian-born billionaire is considering a run for Israel's top office. Arkady Gaydamak, who has gained popularity in Israel with major philanthropic projects, said in an interview published Sunday that he could run against Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in the next elections.

"I command enough public support today to be elected," he told Yediot Achronot. "If I decide to run, I'll take 40 seats in the Knesset. The politicians know this and are afraid."



WORLD REPORT

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For Reconstructionists, growth proves to be a two-edged sword

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Dorshei Tzedek, a small Reconstructionist congregation in West Newton, Mass., began an explosive growth spurt in 1997, some of its members were concerned.

The addition of more than 100 families had nearly tripled the congregation's size in just a few years, and some worried that it was losing its intimate character.

"It was an anxiety-ridden issue for a long time, but that's partly because we didn't understand it," said Nancy Gertz, whose two-year term as president ended in July. "There were people who felt if we get any bigger, they're going to be scared to lose the sense of familiarity they have with everybody in the congregation, lose a sense of intimate connection with the rabbi, their peers."

The establishment of a growth committee and a strategic planning effort have put some of those fears to rest, and led to a more thoughtful growth process, Gertz said.

While some synagogues would kill for that kind of growth spurt, Reconstructionists, who prize a highly participatory form of worship and whose congregations tend to be smaller than those of other movements, see growth as something to be carefully managed so as not to compromise what's essential to the movement.

"We're thinking about growth in lots of different ways," said Carl Sheingold, executive vice president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, the movement's congregational arm.

Sheingold said the movement's devel-

opment is important and there's greater recognition now of the need to get larger, but not at the expense of what he calls a "critical feature" of Reconstructionism: the willingness to experiment and serve as a kind of laboratory for American Jewish life.

"There may be limits to growth we want to think about," Sheingold said. It's "not just a question of running headlong into numbers, but at the same time wanting to grow the movement."

Studies show that roughly 2 percent of American Jews identify as Reconstructionist, but Reconstructionist federation officials say the number of affiliated households is growing by 6 percent to 10 percent a year.

Currently, 109 congregations affiliate with the federation and a growing number are looking to erect buildings, hire full-time rabbis and become more established, full-service synagogues.

That growth poses a challenge to a movement with a high percentage of smaller congregations and that sees highly participatory services and democratic decision-making as central values. Many Reconstructionist communities spun off from more established synagogues, and some fear a loss of intensive commitment and sense of purpose as new members join a core group of founders.

At Bet Am Shalom, a Reconstructionist congregation in White Plains, N.Y., members considered limiting new members when the synagogue's size threatened to become unwieldy, but instead decided to cap

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ Reconstructionist shuls are trying to manage growth carefully

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the number of bar mitzvahs at 36 a year as a way to control expansion without actually turning anyone away.

"We were worried if we had a bar mitzvah every week, that eventually we'd have two every week, and then all we'd be doing was bar mitzvahs and there would no longer be an identifiable central prayer experience for the congregation," Rabbi Lester Bronstein said.

Even so, Bronstein's congregation has grown significantly, from 185 families when he arrived in 1989 to 420 today. That number is considered large for the Reconstructionist movement, but it pales next to Congregation Kehillat Israel in Pacific Palisades, Calif. — which, with roughly 1,000 households, is the largest Reconstructionist synagogue in the world.

Like Bet Am Shalom, K.I., as it's known, also experienced a period of rapid expansion, doubling its membership since it built a larger facility in 1997.

That growth prompted calls to limit new members, though the synagogue rejected this in favor of other strategies — including what its rabbi, Steven Carr Reuben, calls "constant vigilance" to small groups: creating opportunities for individuals to gather in smaller sub-communities around issues of common interest.

"Our key to success is to create communities within communities," Carr Reuben said. "We recognize the synagogue isn't just one community. Those

communities function on their own level and in their own way."

Still, Reconstructionists are hardly growth-averse. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the movement's seminary, is more than halfway through its first development campaign. The \$50 million fund-raising drive may be small by the standards of the other denomina-

tions, but it's a milestone for a movement that represents a tiny fraction of American Jewry. At its biennial convention in Philadelphia last week, the movement introduced a range of new fund-raising instruments, including a soon-to-be-launched Web site aimed at educating congregations about opportunities for planned giving.

The federation also hired its first development director, Barry Nove, a further sign of the professionalization of its fund-raising operations.

"The movement is maturing," said Nove, who joined the federation three months ago. "If we don't plant seeds now, there won't be trees later."

Some of the movement's younger congregations are aggressively pursuing participants. Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann is unique in the movement for marketing her congregation, Kol Tze-

dek, to young unaffiliated Jews in West Philadelphia.

But more common are the challenges posed by the movement's passage to a more advanced stage of life. Many at the convention spoke of Reconstructionism's "maturation" and its evolution from a school of thought spun off of Conservative Judaism by Mordecai

Kaplan to a full-fledged movement, with a network of synagogues, a youth group and, as of last year, a summer camp.

To Sheingold, that maturation is evident at least as much in the attitudes of Reconstructionists as in the movement's structural development.

"The origins of the movement had a lot to do with a desire for a form of religious life in Judaism that was compatible with rationality, with scientific progress," Sheingold said. "In the last 10 to 15 years there have emerged approaches within Reconstructionism that are more tuned in to what has been called the spiritual aspect of life. You really become mature when you can find ways to reconcile those things and you're not debating whether it's about the mind and the heart, but you're finding ways for it to be both." ■

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Rabbi Lester Bronstein

Bet Am Shalom



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Government motion denied in lobbyist trial

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The judge in the classified information case against two former AIPAC lobbyists denied a government attempt to make leaking information to a foreign nation a crime.

The prosecution requested a "clarification" of an earlier decision by Judge T.S. Ellis in the case against Steve Rosen, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's former policy chief, and Keith Weissman, a former Iran analyst.

That decision upheld as constitutional a 1917 statute criminalizing the receipt of classified information, but rejected as unconstitutional the statute's implication that prosecutors need only prove that the leaking benefited a for-

eign nation, and not that it harmed U.S. interests.

Prosecutors asked for an exemption from having to prove that the leaking harmed U.S. interests.

In denying their motion Nov. 16, Ellis exhibited exasperation, because his earlier decision, rejecting a defense motion to dismiss the case, had favored the prosecutors overall.

Denying the government's request, he said, "That's not 'clarification,' that's 'reconsideration.'"

Ellis also hoped to set a trial date at the hearing, but was stymied by the complexity of the process of clearing classified information for use as evidence. ■

Israel blasts U.N. resolution

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and the United Nations are at loggerheads once again.

A U.N. General Assembly resolution deploring civilian deaths in a recent Israeli artillery barrage on the Gaza Strip stirred ire in Jerusalem on Sunday as officials grappled with ways to stem Palestinian rocket salvos.

"We have no doubt that it is the State of Israel which must respond to attacks on civilians," Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told his Cabinet.

"But those who preach morality and roll their eyes have yet to see fit to initiate a resolution in condemnation of those who are shooting with the goal of hitting civilians as a long-range, systematic policy."

Last Friday's resolution, which was passed by a vote of 156-7 with six abstentions, deplored the Nov. 8 shelling of Beit Hanoun, in which 19 civilians died. It called for a U.N. probe and for Israel's immediate withdrawal of troops from the Gaza Strip.

While the resolution was non-binding, it underscored for many Israelis a sense of tacit international support for the Palestinians and indifference to the Jewish state's efforts to contain the conflict.

"Israel withdrew a year ago from Gaza, has deployed its forces on the border with Gaza, was hailed by the whole international community for this step. It has been attacked time and again from

Gaza by Palestinians," said Tourism Minister Isaac Herzog.

"We cannot accept in any shape or manner the capability to attack Israel from across the border from Gaza. Any sane nation would do the same, and the U.N. condemnation is outrageous," he said.

Justice Minister Meir Sheerit accused the United Nations of hypocrisy.

"How come that Israel, which is the victim of attacks, hundreds of rocket attacks from Gaza at Sderot, Ashkelon and other cities, does not warrant even a discussion in the United Nations?" he asked.

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, sounding a rare positive note, said the General Assembly vote appeared to be little more than a frustrated response to the failure of Qatar to get a resolution condemning Israel passed by the U.N. Security Coun-

cil. That bid was torpedoed last week by the United States, which cast a veto.

Political sources said that Israel, which already ruled the Beit Hanoun incident a regrettable accident, was unlikely to cooperate with a U.N. investigation should it be mounted.

But Olmert cautioned his Cabinet colleagues that, given the security situation in Gaza, there was no guarantee such a tragedy would not happen again.

"If anyone has a better way for dealing with the Kassams, let's hear it," he was quoted as saying behind

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Ehud Olmert
Israeli prime minister

closed doors.

There was no reported response, though Defense Minister Amir Peretz did say he was trying to restart a shelved plan to develop a system that would shoot down the incoming rockets. Having a capable system would take years, security sources said. ■

ADL calls for probe in Halimi case

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Anti-Defamation League is calling on the French Interior Ministry to investigate the police handling of the murder of Ilan Halimi, a French Jew abducted and murdered by a Muslim gang earlier this year.

Halimi is believed to have been lured to an apartment in the Parisian suburbs last January, where he was kept prisoner for three weeks while his abductors attempted to extract a ransom from this family.

His death prompted a public outcry in France, and tens of thousands of people — including several public officials — took to the streets of Paris to rally against racism and anti-Semitism.

ADL national director Abraham Foxman was unable to say precisely where he believed the police, who are holding 18 people in custody in connection with the murder, had failed.

But with Halimi's mother Ruth at his side, he insisted that neighbors in the apartment building where Ilan was held knew of the crime unfolding in their

midst and that police should have been able to work faster to save him. "There are a lot of questions that need to be answered," he said.

Foxman's comments came at the tail end of Ruth Halimi's first trip to the United States, in the course of which she was feted at a concert in Washington and honored at a luncheon in New York.

"In a free country like France, one cannot accept the torture Ilan had as a human being, mostly because he was a Jew," Halimi said Nov. 16.

Speaking through an interpreter, Halimi thanked the Jewish community for its support and urged continued vigilance against anti-Semitism in her country.

"We are all responsible for what is going on," Halimi said. "We need to educate children, parents as well, so the other will be the same as one is."

In a private meeting with reporters, Halimi spoke of the magnitude of her loss and of her frustration with French police, who she said could have done more to rescue Ilan. ■

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, the Columbia University chapter of SPME, and the Jewish Law Students Association present: Kenneth L. Marcus, JD, staff director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, speaking on "Campus Anti-Semitism and the Civil Rights Act of 1964."

■ A rally calling for action in Darfur, Sudan, is to take place in Jerusalem's Kikar Zion at 8 p.m. Organized by HAeD — Hatzilu et Amei Darfur, or, Save the Nations of Darfur.

WEDNESDAY

■ The Orthodox Union holds its biennial convention through Saturday in Jerusalem.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Airstrike targeting Hamas wounds 9

An Israeli airstrike against Gaza Strip terrorists wounded at least nine Palestinians. An aerial missile slammed into a car driven by two Hamas fugitives in Gaza City on Sunday; the terrorists were reported to be among those injured.

One of those targeted was described by the IDF as responsible for making Kassam rockets. Witnesses said several bystanders were wounded. Earlier that day, Israel called off an air raid against the house of a senior Palestinian terrorist after it was surrounded by civilians.

Hundreds of Palestinians flocked to the Gaza Strip home of a Popular Resistance Committee commander after Israel warned his family to get out ahead of a planned airstrike. The operation was called off, with military officials citing concern the human shields could be hurt.

Peres plans high-tech weapons

Israel is designing futuristic miniature weaponry under Shimon Peres's guidance. The Israeli vice premier revealed in a Yediot Achronot article over the weekend that, following the lessons of the Lebanon war, he was spearheading new inventions in the field of military nanotechnology. Among the planned devices are a robotic hornet that can photograph terrorists and, if necessary, be used to blow them up.

Also in the works is a bionic hand that will give the wearer additional strength, and special devices that would detect would-be suicide bombers from afar. "The war in Lebanon proved that we need smaller weaponry. It's illogical to send a plane worth \$100 million against a suicide terrorist," Peres told the newspaper. "So we are building futuristic weapons."

Hebrew U. sets up grant for Lebanon reservists

An Israeli university will give grants to its students that served in Lebanon this summer.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem has allocated some \$280,000 to be distributed to 2,000 of its students who were in reserve military duty for at least 11 days during Israel's monthlong conflict with Hezbollah.

The grants will vary according to length of time served, and will be given only to students who are continuing their studies this year.

Jewish group donates to Sderot

The American Jewish Committee donated \$300,000 to Sderot.

The group said in a statement Sunday that the funds will go toward constructing a center that will provide psychological services to the Israeli city's residents. Sderot, which shares a border with the Gaza Strip, is the target of frequent cross-border Palestinian Kassam attacks. The contribution comes from AJC's Israel Emergency Assistance Fund.

WORLD

Sudan agrees to peacekeeping force

Sudan agreed "in principle" to allow a U.N. mission to deploy in Darfur. The agreement was reached in a meeting Nov. 16 in Addis Ababa between U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and representatives of the African Union and U.N. Security Council countries.

The force would be a "hybrid operation" between U.N. forces and those of the African Union already deployed in the area, with the United Nations providing control structures, according to a communique released after the meeting.

Disagreement remains over the exact size of the force, which the communique indicated should number 17,000 troops and 3,000 police. The Jewish Council for Public Affairs called the development a "positive step forward."

U.K. Muslim leader aided Holocaust denier

A British Muslim leader admitted helping fund Holocaust denier David Irving.

Asghar Bukhari, a founding member of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee, was revealed by a British newspaper Sunday to have pledged money to Irving's legal fund in 2000.

He also said in a letter at the time that he would encourage Islamic groups to support Irving and his efforts to "expose certain falsehoods perpetrated by the Jews."

Bukhari confirmed the expose run by The Observer, but said he was motivated by anti-Israel sentiments rather than anti-Semitism.

He also said he opposed Holocaust denial, though he thought it was wrong of an Austrian court to jail Irving earlier this year for his assertions that the scale and planning of the Nazi genocide has been exaggerated.

German politician lauds Hitler

A member of a German state Parliament invoked Adolf Hitler to insult a left-wing politician.

Klaus-Jürgen Menzel, recently thrown out of the extremist National Democratic Party of Germany, said that the politics of Left Party member Peter Porsch, who comes from Austria, makes Menzel think "even more positively" about the "other Austrian," namely Hitler.

In response, the Left Party has called for a special meeting of the board of the Saxony Parliament.

Recently, Menzel said in front of television cameras that he continues to stand by the "Fuehrer," meaning Hitler.

He was thrown out of his party for financial irregularities but retains his parliamentary post.

European Jews face danger, says leader

European Jewish communities urgently need to address the threat of radical Islam, said a European Jewish leader.

Jonathan Joseph, head of the European Council of Jewish Communities, made the comments Saturday, in the lead-up to the organization's biannual meeting Sunday.

Joseph, a London-based businessman, told JTA he hoped community leaders would pick up on his call for activism, to engage "not only with Muslims but with the governments in their respective states, to try to understand why it is that young Muslims are being radicalized."

U.K. Reform leader slams Jerusalem gay march

The rabbinical head of Britain's Reform movement criticized the handling of last week's gay pride event in Jerusalem and the inclusion of Avigdor Lieberman in Israel's coalition.

The Jewish Chronicle reported that in a letter to the Israeli Ambassador to the U.K., Zvi Heifetz, Rabbi Tony Bayfield cited violent protests by the fervently Orthodox against the march and Lieberman's views on Arabs, which include separating Israel's Arab and Jewish populations. Heifetz replied that the Israeli government had "demonstrated clearly its commitment to protecting democracy" by enabling the gay pride event to go ahead — though as a rally at a Jerusalem stadium. As for Lieberman, the ambassador said, "he has joined the government and has accepted its principles. Mr. Lieberman is entitled to express his views, as is any citizen and indeed politician, in every normal Western democracy."