

IN THE NEWS

Gemayel assassination indicative, says Livni

Israel's foreign minister called the assassination of an anti-Syrian Lebanese Cabinet minister "another example of the kind of neighborhood we live in."

The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday quoted Tzipi Livni shortly after the assassination of Christian politician Pierre Gemayel, who was shot to death while driving in his car in Jdeideh, a Beirut suburb. The Phalange Party politician belonged to a prominent family of anti-Syrian politicians.

The Post further quoted Livni as hinting of Syrian involvement in Gemayel's death. "The negative role of Syria is nothing new," she said. "Clearly, Syrian forces are trying to be involved now, but it's too early to say anything concrete."

Settlements built on Palestinians' land?

Forty percent of West Bank Jewish settlements were built on land privately owned by Palestinians, according to a study by a dovish group.

Tuesday's Peace Now report is based on Israel Defense Forces data released by court order. The alleged land grabs include longstanding settlements such as Ma'aleh Adumim, 86 percent of which stands on Palestinian land, and Ariel, 35 percent of which was built on Palestinian land, according to the report.

U.N.: Israel used excessive force

A U.N. investigative team claimed that Israel used excessive force during the Lebanon war.

The New York Times reported that investigators, commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council, published their draft Tuesday.

It cited "a significant pattern of excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate force" against Lebanese civilians, who the report said were subjected to "collective punishment."

WORLD REPORT

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Ties to Israel are nothing new for Senate's next majority leader

By JENNIFER JACOBSON

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As a young lawyer struggling to make a living in Las Vegas, Harry Reid never failed to buy Israel bonds to benefit the United Jewish Appeal.

"I'd say, 'Harry, you can't afford to give that much,'" close friend Neil Galatz recalls. "He'd say, 'I can't afford not to.'"

Reid, 67, is not Jewish, but his wife, Landra, was born Jewish. The couple converted to Mormonism shortly after they were married more than 40 years ago.

They raised their five children as Mormons, but Galatz and others say Reid is fully aware that if they had lived in a different time and place — say, Nazi Germany in the 1940s — the family could have been targeted because of its Jewish roots.

Those close to Reid say it's this realization that has prompted the Democratic senator's longtime support for Israel.

As the newly elected majority leader in the U.S. Senate, Reid will play an instrumental role in crafting U.S. policy in the Middle East. Friends and political observers are confident his position on Israel won't change.

Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.), who is Jewish, can attest to this. Berkley has known Reid for more than 30 years, having walked precincts for Reid when Berkley was a high school senior and Reid was running for Nevada state assembly.

"We have been close friends and political allies, as well, ever since," she says.

Berkley describes her colleague as quiet, thoughtful, intelligent and tough.

"This is a man that was raised in Searchlight, Nevada, in a home that had a dirt floor and no indoor plumbing," she says. "He is the very embodiment of the ideals of America: that it doesn't matter where you're from, you can rise to become one of the most powerful people in this country."

Berkley remembers Reid attending dinners in Las Vegas where he bought Israel Bonds not because he had to, but because he wanted to.

"He had a passion and a commitment not only to the Jewish community, but to the survival of the State of Israel," she says.

Reid helped start Nevada's first Jewish political action committee in the 1980s, she recalls.

He's "always been part and parcel of our community," says Art Marshall, a past president of the Jewish Federation of Las Vegas and a close friend of Reid's. "He's a good guy."

Marshall notes that Mike O'Callaghan, one of Reid's mentors who later became Nevada governor, was himself very involved in the Jewish community. Following O'Callaghan's example, Reid was actively involved in helping Jews leave the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Meyer Bodoff, president of the Jewish Federation of Las Vegas, also praises Reid. Bodoff says the federation gave Reid its highest honor two years ago, an award that has been given out only three times.

Bodoff lauded Reid for helping the federation receive its first federal grant for a retirement community. He also praised his support for Israel.

Galatz, a Las Vegas lawyer, has known Reid since the early days of their careers, when the

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Reid's friends are confident his longstanding support for Israel won't change

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two lawyers used to try personal injury cases against each other. When Reid first ran for Senate in the 1980s, Galatz served as his finance campaign chairman.

Galatz describes Reid, a former boxer and runner, as a "workaholic" with a "good heart."

Reid has a healthy respect for Judaism and likes to honor his wife's past, Galatz says: When his mother-in-law was still alive, Reid and his wife would light Shabbat candles on Friday nights, and the couple still has a mezuzah on the front door of its home.

As Senate majority leader, Reid may face pressure from Arab organizations and other political groups to stop supporting Israel, arguing that it would ease other crises in the Middle East, Galatz says. While that concerns him, Galatz is confident Reid will use his skill as a consensus builder to secure Israel's future and be a successful majority leader.

"This is not a guy who's going to force his will on people and make earth-shattering speeches," Galatz says. "What he is going to do is work effectively with the senators by trying to meld together opinion and consensus. This is one hell of a strong point in a U.S. senator."

But political journalist and commentator David Broder contends that Reid's oratorical skill, or lack thereof, could end up hurting him.

"As minority leader, Reid was remarkably effective in keeping the Democratic caucus united, but far less successful as

a public spokesman for his party," Broder wrote in a recent Washington Post column. "His partisan comments were often too sharp, his television appearances less than commanding. In his new role, he will be far more exposed, and his flaws more conspicuous."

But Reid knows how to use those perceived flaws to his advantage, says Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman, who has known Reid for more than 40 years.

Reid's unassuming demeanor may make people think he's a pushover, but that's far from true, Goodman says: "When you do business with him, he's hard as nails."

That's exactly what the pro-Israel community has come to count on.

In May 2005, before a meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Commit-

tee, Reid told of his recent trip to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. There, Reid said, he and his wife learned the fate of her father's family, the Goldfarbs.

Landra's father, Israel Goldfarb, immigrated from Ukraine to the United States in

the early 1900s, but family members who remained in Europe weren't so lucky: Seven of them were killed by the Nazis, and their names are listed in Yad Vashem's book of martyrs and heroes.

Reid told the group of what a "difficult yet moving and inspiring moment" that had been. And on one particular point, the consensus-builder vowed to give no ground.

"The people of Israel have a right to live in peace," he said. "On this point there can never be any compromise." ■

'This is a man that was raised in Searchlight, Nevada, in a home that had a dirt floor and no indoor plumbing.'

U.S. Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.)

Assassination sharpens Lebanese divide

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If chances of a Lebanese-Israeli peace agreement seemed distant after Israel's war this summer with Hezbollah, the assassination of a leading Lebanese Christian politician has further dampened the prospects.

Tuesday's assassination of Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel, a fierce critic of Syrian influence on his country, has sharpened the divisions between Lebanese of pro-Western leanings and those in league with Syria.

If such a conflict ends up with Hezbollah and other pro-Syrian forces gaining the upper hand, it will put the chance of an Israeli-Lebanese peace accord ever further over the horizon — and could entrench the Shi'ite terrorist group as the main powerbroker in Lebanon, doing the bidding of Syria and Iran and doing its utmost to keep Israel's northern border under threat.

"It feels as though Lebanon could erupt into major internal strife, even civil war," said Matti Steinberg, a retired Israeli intelligence analyst.

Tuesday's hit had all the markings of a professional job. Gemayel's car was cornered in a quiet Beirut suburb by gunmen who sprayed him with silenced weapons.

But there was nothing subtle about the blame-laying that was quick to follow.

"Today one of our main believers in a free democratic Lebanon has been killed. We believe the hands of Syria are all over the place," said Sa'ad Hariri, whose father, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, was assassinated in February 2005.

Gemayel's uncle, Bashir, was assassinated shortly after being elected Lebanon's president in 1982. He was in favor of normalizing ties with the Jewish state.

When Israel allowed Gemayel's Christian militia into Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon to settle scores with the killers, the result was the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

Syria, whose decades-old history of meddling in Lebanese affairs has been under intense international scrutiny since Hariri pere's death, denied involvement in the new assassination.

Yet analysts said Damascus had much to gain by eliminating a prominent reformist minister like Gemayel, especially since his loss further weakens a Lebanese government already hard-hit by the walkout earlier this month of six pro-Syrian Cabinet members. ■



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Free-speech debate rages on at colleges

By BEN HARRIS and JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — A controversy over free-speech restrictions on college campuses continues to grow after Jewish student leaders at Brown University canceled an appearance by a pro-Israel speaker because a Muslim chaplain called her controversial.

Jewish students had asked the student board of Brown's chapter of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life to co-sponsor a Nov. 30 speech by Nonie Darwish, an Arab who had become pro-Israel and is the author of "Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel, and the War on Terror."

Earlier this month, however, after tentatively agreeing to sponsor the event, the board nixed the event after Brown's Muslim chaplain, Rumeel Ahmed, raised objections.

Born in Cairo and raised in Gaza, Darwish is the daughter of an Egyptian intelligence officer killed by Israeli soldiers. She says she was indoctrinated from childhood to hate Israel but changed her views after befriending Jews who yearned for peace and after her brother's life was saved by Jewish doctors at Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital. She since has converted to Christianity and attends an evangelical church.

The California-based Darwish now speaks around the United States on the difficulties women face under Islam and on the Muslim jihad against Israel.

According to Serena Eisenberg, director of Brown's Hillel, Jewish students wanted to bring Darwish to speak about rights in the Middle East, and by default in Israel. They enlisted Hillel and Brown's Sarah Doyle Women's Center as sponsors.

But Ahmed reportedly said Darwish's views were offensive to Muslims, who Ahmed claims live in fear at the university. Then "the Muslim Students Association and the Muslim chaplain and the Chaplain's Office expressed concern about bringing Nonie to campus, so the women's group withdrew their sponsorship," Eisenberg told JTA on Monday.

Neither Ahmed nor Gail Cohee, director of the Women's Center, would return phone calls from JTA.

Once the Women's Center withdrew its sponsorship, the Hillel students considered whether they wanted to be the lone sponsors of an event that could prove controversial, Eisenberg said.

According to Yael Richardson, the Hillel chapter's student president, the board was lobbied by Ahmed and via e-mail by Brown's head chaplain, the Rev. Janet Cooper Nelson.

Cooper Nelson "told us to think about the implications of what this would do with our religious communities on campus," Richardson said. "She encouraged us to think carefully about whether we wanted to fund the event."

After researching Darwish's writings and past statements, the five members of the board decided against bringing her to campus so as not to jeopardize their "lovely" relationship with Muslim counterparts, Richardson said. Eisenberg said there also were scheduling issues.

Richardson said she's proud of the decision, which earned Hillel a scathing rebuke from the New York Post and led to the resignation of one student Hillel official.

In an e-mail message to Jewish student leaders obtained by JTA, Eisenberg urged students to consider whether the event was "of such benefit as to outweigh the rifts we are certain to cause in the Muslim community and perhaps among Jewish students and others on campus who question whether Hillel should be bring [sic] Arab speakers to campus who speak poorly of Islam."

But she says she wanted the decision to come directly from the students.

"Did the Muslim Students Association and the administration exert some influence? Yes," Eisenberg said. "Did our board cave? No. They made a thoughtful decision about constructive dialogue and about moving forward."

However, the cancellation comes after Brown's Office of the Chaplains and Religious Life supported Palestinian Solidarity Week earlier this month "over my objections," Eisenberg said.

That event was sponsored by the parents of Rachel Corrie, an American student and pro-Palestinian volunteer who was run over and killed as she tried to stop an Israeli bulldozer from searching for arms-smuggling tunnels in the Gaza Strip. Since her death in 2003, Corrie has become an icon for pro-Palestinian groups on college

campuses such as the International Solidarity Movement.

Cooper Nelson, the head chaplain, did not return repeated calls from JTA.

Brown officials did offer a response, and suggested that Darwish may speak at the university at some point.

The decision to cancel the Darwish event angered several pro-Israel students involved in planning it and prompted Yoni Bedine, a Brown student and Hillel staff member responsible for Israel programming, to resign.

"I think the failure here was a failure of Jewish leadership," he told JTA. "I think it sends a really bad message to potential future Jewish leaders. I think it was a catastrophic decision in terms of the precedents that it sets."

Darwish is the latest in a series of controversial speakers on the Middle East who have had their appearances canceled amid complaints from opposition groups.

Darwish denied that she was con-

troversial, and her Brown supporters say they carefully vetted her writings to ensure there was nothing inflammatory.

"I never speak against the Koran, I speak against terrorism," Darwish said. "Books don't commit terrorism, people do."

She has had only one other speaking engagement canceled because of fears of controversy, said Darwish, who claims there's a concerted campaign of intimidation aimed at Muslims who speak out about their own culture.

"Any Arab who speaks differently from the status quo is immediately just branded as traitor, and they want to shut us up," she told JTA. "We left the Middle East thinking we're coming to America, our freedom of speech is protected. And then the radicals follow us here and shut us up."

Bedine insists he wanted Darwish's talk to be constructive. But others say the sensitivity argument is being carried too far — and often is applied in only one direction. Bedine says he wouldn't have asked Muslim students to cancel speakers at Palestinian Solidarity Week, though Jewish students found some of them controversial.

"We're here to be challenged and hear the full spectrum of views," Bedine said. "In free speech, toes get stepped on." ■

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

The decision to cancel the Darwish event prompted a Hillel staff member to resign.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Two die in Gaza clashes

Two Palestinians died in clashes with Israel in the Gaza Strip. One Palestinian gunman and a 70-year-old woman died in Zeitoun on Tuesday. It was unclear which side's fire killed the woman.

The gunman was a senior Hamas terrorist; his brother was taken in for questioning.

Rocket wounds Israeli

An Israeli man was critically wounded by Palestinian rocket fire. The Kassam rocket hit a Sderot factory Tuesday, a half-mile from the convoy of visiting United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour.

Arbour traveled to the factory, where Israelis pelted her with stones and accused her of anti-Israel bias.

Addressing Sderot residents later, she said that "Israel has a responsibility to defend its citizens, but has to do so only by legal means," The New York Times reported. Arbour visited Palestinians in Beit Hanoun on Monday.

Israeli Arab spy sentenced

An Israeli Arab was sentenced following a conviction for spying for Iran. Jaris Jaris, 59, who was arrested in 2005, was sentenced to 34 months in prison and one year of probation, the Jerusalem Post reported. He had been recruited by Iran and instructed to use his political influence to become a member of the Knesset through the Meretz Party.

Israeli gay couples get limited recognition

Israel's High Court of Justice ordered the government to recognize homosexuals who marry abroad. The court found Tuesday in favor of petitions filed by five gay Israeli couples that had married in Canada and wanted to be registered as married by the Interior Ministry in Jerusalem.

As a result, the couples will face fewer bureaucratic hurdles regarding marital rights such as inheritance and tax breaks. The ruling will not apply to same-sex unions performed in Israel, which are not recognized by the state.

IDF reports record motivation

Israel's military reported record levels of motivation among recent conscripts. According to Israel Defense Forces data published by the media Tuesday, 70.8 percent of winter draftees who have eligible health profiles volunteered for elite combat units, an unprecedentedly high figure.

The regular infantry brigades reported more applicants than places in their units. The data appeared to offset speculation that Israel's military morale would suffer in the wake of the inconclusive summer war against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Amar: Change law on immigrant converts

Israel's Sephardi chief rabbi proposed denying automatic citizenship to Jewish converts.

Rabbi Shlomo Amar said Tuesday that the Law of Return, which currently grants immigrant converts the right to become naturalized Israeli citizens, should be amended. "Jewish law is very clear on this: There is only one form of conversion," Amar told Israel Radio, referring to Orthodox ritual, rather than Conservative or Reform. "My proposal, by applying to all types of conversion, would prevent infighting."

It was not immediately clear how far Amar has gone in trying to legislate the change.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. to address cluster bombs

The United States will play an active role in discussions about international law and the use of cluster bombs.

The announcement was in a State Department release on last week's conference of nations signed to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which met in Geneva. The conference dealt mostly with land mines, but human rights groups pressured members to address cluster munitions because of concerns arising out of Israel's war with Hezbollah this summer.

Both sides have been charged with war crimes for using the munitions, and at least a dozen Lebanese — mostly children — allegedly have been killed by U.S.-manufactured cluster bombs left behind by Israel.

The State Department statement did not cite the war, but said it joined in "agreeing to a meeting in the Convention's framework, focused primarily on cluster munitions, including their technical aspects and the applicable law. The United States intends to participate actively in this meeting."

NCJW opposes family planning boss

The National Council of Jewish Women called on the Bush administration to rescind its choice for family planning chief. The White House last week appointed Dr. Eric Keroack as deputy assistant secretary for population affairs.

Keroack previously headed a chain of pregnancy clinics that advises against contraception and promotes "abstinence only" contraception. One of his new tasks will be to distribute contraception information to low-income women. "Dr. Keroack has not only stated his own opposition to contraception, he has demonstrated that his personal religious views about sex outweigh his commitment to science-based decision-making," NCJW said in a statement last week.

"We call upon the administration to rescind Dr. Keroack's appointment and search for another candidate — one committed to the mission of the federal family planning program."

N.Y. men indicted over Hezbollah TV

A New York court charged two men with providing Hezbollah television broadcasts.

An indictment unsealed Monday at Manhattan Federal Court said the suspects had violated anti-terrorism laws by using their Brooklyn-based television service to provide satellite broadcasts of Al-Manar, the mouthpiece of the Lebanese terrorist group.

Both men have pleaded not guilty and been released on bail. They are to appear in court again Jan. 8.

WORLD

E.C. won't back academic boycotts

The European Commission said it does not back boycotts of Israeli academic institutions.

The International Campaign for Academic Freedom and Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, two groups campaigning against such boycotts, solicited the E.C.'s position after 61 Irish academics wrote to the Irish Times in September, calling for a moratorium on E.U. support of Israeli academic institutions until Israel ends its occupation of areas claimed by Palestinians.

In a letter last week, the E.C.'s External Relations Directorate-General said such boycotts "are contrary to the principles of academic freedom and its objective of encouraging scientific cooperation." The European Commission is the executive body of the European Union.