



IN THE NEWS

Hundreds of thousands march for Hezbollah

Hundreds of thousands of protesters led by Hezbollah marched in downtown Beirut. The Sunday protest demanded that Prime Minister Fouad Siniora either cede some government power to the militant group and its allies or resign, The Associated Press reported.

Hezbollah has been pressing for increased power since its war with Israel over the summer. Lebanese troops Sunday sealed off Siniora's compound, as well as the roads nearby.

Siniora and most of his ministers have stayed in the complex since Dec. 1, when Hezbollah launched massive protests.

Abbas threatens Palestinian elections

Mahmoud Abbas is expected to call early Palestinian Authority elections this week.

Aides to the Palestinian Authority president quoted him as saying over the weekend that an announcement of new presidential and parliamentary elections was days away after Abbas' Fatah faction failed to form a coalition with the governing Hamas.

Mogul eyes largest Jewish foundation

Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson will reportedly start a foundation that will dole out more than \$200 million annually to Jewish causes.

The third-richest person in the United States, according to Forbes, Adelson is chairman of the board of the Las Vegas Sands Corp., which owns and operates the Sands and the Venetian Casino Resort in Las Vegas, where he lives.

Married to an Israeli physician, Adelson recently gave \$25 million to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. When contacted by JTA, Adelson's personal attorney would not comment on the gift, reported by Ha'aretz; neither would Adelson's publicist.

WORLD REPORT

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Conservative day schools to debate admitting kids of non-Jewish moms

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — The Conservative movement's Solomon Schechter day schools are considering changing their bylaws to admit the children of non-Jewish mothers, JTA has learned.

The 76 Schechter schools in the United States and Canada officially only admit children who are Jewish according to the Conservative movement's interpretation of Jewish law, which means children born to a Jewish mother or those who have converted.

Most schools do admit children who are in the process of converting, but they do so quietly, on a case-by-case basis.

The proposed change, which will be circulated in draft format Sunday at the Solomon Schechter Day School Association's convention in Boca Raton, Fla., would permit, but not require, schools to admit such children openly.

The new policy would require that the child convert before bar or bat mitzvah age, but it would be up to individual schools to determine how long that process should take.

The move is part of the Conservative movement's increased efforts to reach out to its growing number of intermarried families.

After years of resisting more inclusive outreach policies urged by its liberal wing, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism — the movement's congregational arm — seems to have taken the reins of a movement in flux and is steering it in the direction of greater openness.

The discussion also comes as the Conservative movement's highest legal authority paved the way for same-sex commitment ceremonies and the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis.

Movement leaders said the day-school proposal should not be seen as a first step toward accepting patrilineal Jews, which is the term for children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers.

The Reform movement's acceptance of such children, as long as they were being raised Jewish, set off a furor among non-Reform Jews. Conservative authorities said the decision would lead to further schisms among the movements.

One expert in Jewish education said the proposed change for the Schechter schools would "end the 'culture of dishonesty' of the current admissions practice, which 'makes the patrilineals into closeted Jews.'"

The intensified outreach efforts date back to the United Synagogue's Boston biennial in December when Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the group's executive vice president, announced a movement-wide kiruv, or "ingathering" initiative, to make intermarried families more welcome in Conservative institutional life.

The ultimate goal is still for the non-Jews in those families to convert, but the initiative signaled the leadership's awareness, in their view, that a welcoming attitude toward such families is needed and proper.

"It's part of the broader pattern of nurturing whatever Jewish spark there is rather than inadvertently dampening that spark," said Rabbi Avis Miller of Congregation Adas Israel in Washington, who chaired the Conservative rabbinical association's outreach committee in the 1990s.

Early this year, Epstein began urging Schechter schools to relax their admissions policy. On Monday, he plans to address the convention day school delegates in Florida,

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *The proposal is not a step toward accepting patrilineal Jews, movement leaders say*

Continued from page 1

"passionately urging" them to accept the proposed bylaw change.

A final decision will be made after the convention by the association's board of directors.

"Some people say it's a weakening of standards. Absolutely not," Epstein told JTA. "It's counterproductive to say to people who want to raise their children as Jews that they can't come to receive a Jewish education. Studies indicate that people choose Judaism in part because of knowledge and in part because of relationships. What better place to form a strong Jewish relationship than day school?"

Elaine Cohen, United Synagogue's consultant to the Schechter schools, said it's about "reframing current policy in more inclusive language."

She said the most substantive change being proposed is an extension of the time a family has to convert the child.

"We think it has to be before bar or bat mitzvah, preferably by age 10, but we're not going to say it has to be done within two or three years," Cohen said. "We'll leave it to the discretion of the school."

Miller questioned whether the lack of a unified national policy would work. She noted a hypothetical case: What if the child of a non-Jewish mother transfers from one Schechter school to another and faces a different conversion deadline?

She also foresees conflicts between day schools and other Conservative institutions that might not accept patrilineal Jews.

"A synagogue might say to participate in

our programs the child has to be Jewish," Miller said. Still, she added, "I wish them luck."

On March 6, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, the outgoing Jewish Theological Seminary chancellor, made a similar appeal to the movement's Ramah summer camps, which also do not openly admit children of non-Jewish mothers.

Rabbi Mitchell Cohen, director of the National Ramah Commission, said the camps have not yet decided whether to change their admissions policy since Schorsch's appeal, although like Schechter schools, they "work closely with individual families if the children are under bar and bat mitzvah age, and if they agree that camp will be an important part" of their conversion process.

Cohen said the proposed changes to the Schechter admissions policy should not be seen as steps toward recognizing patrilineal descent, although he acknowledged that "some people might see it that way."

The end goal is quite clear, he said — the child must formally convert to Judaism. It's just the warmth of the initial embrace that is changing.

Some Conservative rabbis and Schechter school directors around the country say it's about time for change.

"It's long overdue," said Rabbi Lavey Derby of Congregation Kol Shofar in Tiburon, Calif. "There are a great many religiously committed Jews who marry non-Jews for a variety of reasons and want to raise Jewish children."

At least one Jewish education expert outside the Conservative movement warned darkly about "a big backlash" from the movement's conservative wing when the proposed change is announced.

But even those Conservative leaders who are more circumspect note that leaving the decision up to individual schools means no change is required, and certainly not right away.

"I don't see it as changing our admissions policy very much," said Marci Dickman, head of school for the three campuses of the Solomon Schechter Day School of

Metropolitan Chicago. Like other Schechter schools, the Chicago school works with children who are "on their way to conversion," but she noted that such cases "don't come up that often, and when they do, we and the family want the child to convert."

Some schools, on the other hand, are going beyond the proposed changes.

In St. Louis, the city's 12 Conservative rabbis have been working since September

to create a unified policy for their Schechter school "that would be acceptable to us as rabbis and livable for our school," said Rabbi Carnie Rose of B'nai Amoona.

The policy, sent to the school board this week, specifies that the school will accept a child of a non-Jewish mother up to the age of bar or bat mitzvah. The child will be assigned a rabbinic mentor who will work closely with the family,

"so it will not come as a surprise" that the child will be asked to convert by age 12 or 13, or else leave the school.

"There's a difference between pre-bar mitzvah, when it's 'all for the sake of hinuch,' " or education, "and post-bar mitzvah, when you take on the yoke of the commandments," Rose said.

The school would also admit children of non-Jewish mothers after bar mitzvah age, with the stipulation that they must convert within a year.

Ultimately, although the focus of this weekend's debate in Florida will be narrow, the conversation goes beyond how many years to allow a non-halachically Jewish child to remain in a Conservative school before conversion, and addresses how the Conservative movement looks at the role of a day school education.

How much, asks the Ramah Commission's Cohen, should a Schechter school be seen "as a subtle inducement to the child and the family" to consider formal conversion, in which case a more open admissions policy is appropriate? Or is it more important to safeguard movement standards unapologetically?

The debate goes to the heart of a Conservative day school's identity, said Arnold Zar-Kessler, head of the Schechter day school in Newton, Mass. ■

It's counterproductive to say to people who want to raise their children as Jews that they can't come to receive a Jewish education.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein

Executive vice president, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

JTA

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THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ President Bush goes to the State Department to launch talks on how to deal with Iraq, prompted by the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. In addition to top diplomats, the president will also consult with Iraqi officials and senior military officials.

■ Faith and political leaders come to the Ad Hoc Leadership Coalition for Justice in New York City to denounce the Holocaust denial conference being hosted by Iran today and tomorrow. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella body representing 51 national Jewish organizations, is a member of the coalition.

TUESDAY

■ A Middle East briefing features Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's recently appointed minister of strategic affairs and deputy prime minister. Lieberman, on his first U.S. tour in his new capacity, will speak in New York City on "My Vision for Israel."

■ The American Jewish Congress honors Matthew Goldstein, chancellor of the City University of New York, at its 2006 National Award for Excellence in Education Dinner in New York City. The guest speaker is best-selling author David Nasaw.

FRIDAY

■ Natan Sharansky receives the Presidential Medal of Honor at the White House. Sharansky, a former refusenik, joins a prestigious list of non-U.S. citizens who have been awarded both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor — including Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II.

■ Jewish Women International honors 11 "women to watch" in Washington. They are Dr. Perri Klass, Carol Shapiro and Cindy Spiegel, all of New York City; Michelle Bernstein of Miami; Wendy Drucker of Newport News, Va.; Susan Manheimer of San Mateo, Calif.; Dr. Marcella Roenneberg of Pikesville, Md.; Marcella Kanfer Rolnick of Akron, Ohio; Aviva Tessler of Potomac, Md.; Lorey Zlotnick of Los Angeles; and Rabbi Susan Shankman of Washington.

SATURDAY

■ The New York Sephardic Music Festival offers performances at Manhattan venues during Chanukah, through Dec. 24.

■ A Mah jong Web site hosts an online tournament during Chanukah running through Dec. 23. Registration is free. The four players left at the final table win cash prizes of up to \$2,000. See www.MahjongTime.com.

Jews mourn Jeane Kirkpatrick

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — She was an ardent defender of the State of Israel in one of the world's least hospitable environments. But those who knew her say Jeane Kirkpatrick, who died Friday at age 80, was comfortable swimming against the current.

She was "very forceful, very strong, a daughter of Oklahoma, great sense of humor," said Bill Bennett, a former U.S. secretary of education. "She held her own."

Although she was a lifelong Democrat, Kirkpatrick was appointed by President Reagan to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, a post she assumed in 1981 and held for four years.

Kirkpatrick's passing elicited a torrent of praise from the Jewish community. Major Jewish organizations issued statements mourning Kirkpatrick and remembering her as a vocal supporter of Israel, both at the United Nations — where she was America's first female envoy — and in other forums.

"She was a great friend of Israel, of the Jewish people," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Hoenlein noted that Kirkpatrick never ran for public office and her positions emerged not from calculations of political expediency, but "purely out of her deep conviction and belief."

She distinguished herself as a vocal critic of communist regimes, arguing for direct U.S. support to anti-communist governments, even authoritarian ones, a policy that fell into disfavor after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

After the attacks, she joined with Bennett and former U.S. Sen. Jack Kemp in calling on Congress to declare war against "the entire fundamentalist Islamic terrorist network."

Kirkpatrick's reputation received a

significant boost after publication of an influential essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," which appeared in the November 1979 issue of *Commentary Magazine*, a publication started by the American Jewish Committee.

Her tenure at the United Nations coincided with Israel's war in Lebanon in 1982, a period when the Jewish state was particularly isolated in the international community.

Aaron Jacob, associate director of international affairs for the AJCommittee and at the time a junior diplomat at Israel's U.N. mission, recalled Kirkpatrick as a "staunch supporter" of Israel. Jacob said the American mission under her leadership was "very friendly."

Her passing drew praise from both sides of the political aisle, with dignitaries saluting her clear moral vision and her staunch advocacy of American values.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) called

Kirkpatrick a "clarion voice for freedom" who lived "a life of a tribune of democracy."

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) said Kirkpatrick "stood up for the interests of America while at the United Nations, lent a powerful moral voice to the Reagan foreign policy and has been a source of wise counsel to our nation since leaving the government two decades ago."

Kirkpatrick was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, in May 1985, and twice received the Department of Defense's highest civilian honor, the Distinguished Public Service Medal. In 1998 she received the 50th Anniversary Friend of Zion Award from the Israeli prime minister.

After her government service, Kirkpatrick returned to previous positions as a professor of government at Georgetown University and senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank.

OBITUARY

Jeane Kirkpatrick was
a 'clarion voice for
freedom' who lived
'a life of a tribune of
democracy.'

Sen. Joseph Lieberman

U.S. senator, Connecticut

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. says Hezbollah has Iraq role

The United States believes Iran is using Hezbollah to target U.S. forces in Iraq. Reports have proliferated in recent weeks about Shi'ite insurgents training with Hezbollah during its war this summer against Israel on the Israel-Lebanon border.

Speaking on background, a Bush administration official confirmed to JTA on Saturday that the reports have been substantiated. "We are deeply concerned at the increasing Iranian role, both directly and through insurgents, including through Hezbollah, to elements in Iraq engaged in violence against our forces," the official said.

Livni: Promote alternative to Hamas

Israel and the West must help Palestinian moderates create an alternative to the Hamas government, Israel's foreign minister said. It was not enough to bolster Mahmoud Abbas, Palestinian Authority president and the leader of the relatively moderate Hamas party, Tzipi Livni said last Friday at a State Department gala dinner in Washington.

"We have to find a way to strengthen, to create a genuine alternative to the Hamas government — and a genuine alternative is not only a presidency," Livni said at the dinner, which launched this year's Saban Forum, an event that brings together Israeli and U.S. leaders.

Congress condemns Iran Holocaust conference

The U.S. Congress unanimously condemned Iran's conference questioning the Holocaust. Last Friday, the last day of the 109th Congress, both the Senate and House of Representatives unanimously passed resolutions condemning the conference to be held Monday and Tuesday in Tehran.

The resolutions were sponsored by Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.). Both resolutions cited Iran's Holocaust denial in the context of the international community's efforts to roll back what is believed to be Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Senate approves Red Crystal

The U.S. Senate certified the Red Crystal, paving the way for Magen David Adom's acceptance into the International Red Cross' bodies. The Red Cross approved the symbol — which resembles a playing card diamond — earlier this year, ending a decades-long shutout of non-Muslim and non-Christian groups such as Israel's first responder, which rejected using the Red Cross and Red Crescent symbols as inappropriate.

The Red Cross had also rejected the Star of David symbol used by MDA. The Senate's certification last Friday, the last day of Congress, protects the symbol's copyright and follows similar legislation passed last week in the U.S. House of Representatives.

U.S. Jewish population rising?

The new American Jewish Yearbook reports that there are 6.4 million Jews in the United States. That's significantly more than the 5.2 million figure provided by the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Study.

The yearly survey, published by the American Jewish Committee, is based on a tally of individual Jewish communities across the country.

According to the survey, 2.2 percent of the American population is Jewish. New York has the largest Jewish population of any state with 1,618,000, followed by California with 1,194,000, Florida with 653,000 and New Jersey with 480,000, the AJCommittee said in a release.

WORLD

London mayor finally apologizes

London's mayor apologized to the city's Jewish community for offensive comments. In a surprise step Dec. 7, Ken Livingstone apologized at the launch of the London Jewish Forum, a group intended to serve as a platform for the Jewish community to engage with municipal bodies.

Livingstone's relationship with the Jewish community long has been strained because of his vehement criticism of Israel, and worsened after he refused to apologize for a Nazi jibe he made earlier this year. Livingstone was exonerated last month of charges that he brought the Mayor's Office into disrepute by comparing a Jewish journalist to a concentration camp guard.

In his speech, Livingstone recognized Jewish contributions to making London a cosmopolitan city.

He then apologized for any offense he caused London Jews during his tenure, describing himself as "an equal-opportunity rude person" and adding, "it was never a calculated intention to cause offense."

"The Jewish community and the mayor can now begin to move toward a more positive relationship," said Adrian Cohen, chairman of the forum.

MIDDLE EAST

Olmert talks tough on Iran

Ehud Olmert said Israel would not rule out military action as a last resort against the Iranian nuclear program. In an interview published Sunday, the Israeli prime minister voiced dismay at the failure of Western diplomatic pressure to curb Iran's atomic ambitions. "I am anything but happy. I expect that significantly more dramatic steps be taken," Olmert told Germany's *Der Spiegel*.

"Here is a leader who says openly that it is his aim to wipe Israel off the map," he said, referring to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. "Israel is a member of the United Nations."

Asked if Israel could launch a pre-emptive strike akin to its 1981 bombing sortie against the Iraqi atomic reactor at Osirak, Olmert said: "I rule nothing out."

Israeli arms sales up

Israel's arms exports are reportedly at an all-time high despite the setbacks of the Lebanon war.

The latest edition of *Defense News* journal reported that by late November, Israel had tallied some \$4.1 billion in new foreign weapons orders for 2006, outdoing the previous record year, 2002.

The figures made Israel the world's fourth-biggest arms seller after the United States, Russia and France.

Trump boosts Israel

Donald Trump praised Israel's economy. "I have tremendous confidence in the strength and potential of the Israeli economy, although I know the country has had to go through a lot in recent months," the American property magnate said in a videophone interview at a business conference in Tel Aviv over the weekend, according to *The Jerusalem Post*.

"Israel is one of my favorite places in the world; it is a great country."

Trump plans to erect Israel's tallest building, a 70-story luxury residential structure, in Ramat Gan.

Joining the interview, Donald Trump Jr., the Trump organization's vice president, credited former Israeli Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with making the economy attractive to foreign investors.