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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Fire foils bombing attempt

Israeli police and firefighters prevented the detonation of an explosive-laden van in downtown Jerusalem. Israeli officials blamed Hamas for the attempted bombing. [Page 4]

Mordechai, Abbas meet

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, met in Tel Aviv in an effort to break the stalemated peace process. [Page 4]

Swiss Jewish site targeted

Swiss police are investigating whether a parcel left outside a Jewish building in Geneva was a bomb. The parcel, discovered last Friday night, contained electronic equipment that is normally used for a bomb, according to the Geneva police, who believe it was placed outside the headquarters of a local Jewish communal building in an attempt to spread fear among Swiss Jews. The mysterious package was handed over to the Zurich police for examination.

Supermarket launches boycott

The Swiss supermarket chain Denner launched a boycott of American goods in its 286 branches across Switzerland. Denner's action comes in the wake of a call by the right-wing Swiss Democratic Party earlier this month for an immediate boycott of American and Jewish goods.

The Swiss Parliament is expected to discuss soon whether to lift the parliamentary immunity of Rudolf Keller, the president of the Swiss Democrats, who may be prosecuted for urging the boycott.

E.U. delegation visits Iran

A delegation from the European Union held two days of talks with Iranian officials. The discussions involved human rights, arms control and the war against drugs, according to Iranian state radio.

Ties between Europe and Iran reached a low point last year after a German court ruled that Iranian leaders had ordered the 1992 slayings of Kurdish dissidents in Germany. The European Union decided to attempt to renew its so-called critical dialogue with Iran because of the relatively moderate statements made during the past year by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

In growing numbers, Jewish adults are seeking to fill a knowledge gap

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — From the outside, it looked like Kenneth Cohen had it all.

A founding executive of the software giant Oracle Corporation, Cohen worked for the innovative company in California's Silicon Valley.

With a wife and young daughter at home, life should have felt complete. But something, Cohen says, was missing.

"It's just inevitable that you say to yourself, 'What do I want to pass on to this kid other than my stock certificates?'"

"I had to have a higher goal," he says.

So in his mid-30s, Cohen began to pick up where his Bar Mitzvah had left off by taking a couple of courses through Lehrhaus, the Berkeley, Calif.-based provider of adult Jewish education.

One class led to another — from Bible to Hebrew to Jewish theology — and at age 40, Cohen retired from Oracle in order to pursue Jewish studies full time.

After earning a master's degree in the field, today he is an expert on biblical history and one of Lehrhaus' most popular teachers.

"Doing and receiving Jewish education is a remarkably rewarding thing," says Cohen, who also serves as president of the school.

"It's passing on not the latest hot computer chip, which will be obsolete next year, but taking the accumulated knowledge of humankind and perpetuating that, passing it on to new generations who will add their own insights and pass it on."

Although Cohen's journey from one career to another isn't typical, his interest in studying Judaism as an adult reflects a dramatic new phenomenon in American Jewish life.

Synagogues have long offered adult education courses, most of them lasting a handful of sessions.

Congregants were too busy, it was presumed, to commit to more.

But what's happening now is turning that notion on its head: Non-denominational, independent institutions offering intensive adult Jewish education are being established across the country and are growing rapidly.

Suddenly, it seems, Jewish learning is sexy.

"It's an awakening," says Paul Flexner, director of human resources development and head of adult education at JESNA, the Jewish Education Service of North America, an agency that provides support to professionals in the field.

Thousands of adults, many with children at home and long hours at work, are making time each week to meet in synagogues, Jewish community centers or private facilities to participate in these classes.

Among the programs around the country to which they are flocking:

- The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School program, based at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, is adding seven more American sites to its program in the fall, bringing the total to 34 locations.

Each offers a two-year, 120-hour course of study to several groups of students at a time.

- Boston's Me'ah program, established four years ago with two classes, will have 20 sections this fall with 450 students committed to two years of study.

Also, for the first time, Me'ah is branching out, taking the program to Cleveland

MIDEAST FOCUS

Times of London report denied

Israeli officials denied a report in the Sunday Times of London that an Israeli businessman sentenced to 16 years imprisonment last week for selling chemical weapons agents to Iran had used his contacts in Tehran to locate missing Israeli airman Ron Arad.

The officials said all the information Nahum Manbar provided in the early 1990s was proven false and that he had contributed nothing to efforts to locate Arad.

Israel maintains that Iran is holding Arad, who bailed out from his fighter plane over Lebanon in 1986.

Israel plans new satellite

Israel will launch a new satellite before the aging Ofek 3 runs out of energy later this year, according to the chairman of the Israel Space Agency.

Ofek 3, which was launched into orbit in 1995, has been described by intelligence sources as a spy satellite capable of collecting military information on such neighboring foes as Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Paid trips to Israel rank high

Trips to Israel that are paid by an affiliate of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee for members and staff of the U.S. House and Senate ranked in the top five of all-expenses-paid overseas missions last year, according to a study by the Center for Responsive Politics.

AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby, has defended its free Israel trips in the face of criticism from campaign-watchdog groups as legitimate fact-finding missions.

Assad, Chirac conclude talks

Syrian President Hafez Assad concluded talks with French President Jacques Chirac in Paris saying he was open to new initiatives to make peace with Israel, but he insisted no breakthrough was in sight. Assad's visit to France was his first in 22 years.



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and Stamford, Conn. Other cities have also expressed interest.

- The Lehrhaus program has doubled its student body to 4,000 in the past few years.

Students choose from about 275 course offerings.

Some courses are as short as one-day seminars, but other classes go on for 12 weeks.

"Beyond the Torah," taught by Cohen, examines biblical writings and history. His student group of roughly 30 people has been meeting for three years.

- The Jewish Community Centers Association is offering a course called "Derech Torah," or "The Way of Torah," in two dozen communities.

- The American Jewish Committee last year started offering a course in 20 locations around the country.

Its class on "The Jews, God and Politics" has been going on for four years in Washington, where congressional aides, White House staffers and journalists participate.

- A weekly study group in Los Angeles sponsored by the Avi Chai Foundation attracts television writers and movie producers.

- Denominational groups from the Orthodox Aish HaTorah to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, based in suburban Philadelphia, are offering similarly intensive courses.

Although programs differ in approach, one thing is consistent, say those involved: The majority of students are in their 30s, 40s and 50s.

And a majority of the students are Jewish baby-boomers who are searching for meaning.

For many, formal Jewish education stopped the moment their Bar or Bat Mitzvah party ended, if they had any training at all.

Many members of that generation have an acute awareness of how much they don't know.

They are also realizing that they want to pass Judaism on to their children but, stunted by Jewish illiteracy, cannot.

"All of this language about 'continuity' is trickling down a little bit," says Betsy Dolgin Katz, North American director of the Melton program. "People want to do something to see that Judaism continues."

Another common thread among many of those enrolling in these adult learning classes is interfaith marriage.

The majority of those in the 20-week Introduction to Judaism course that Molly Ornati took in her Brooklyn, N.Y., neighborhood were involved in such relationships.

"Our generation thought that intermarriage" would not bring up religious conflicts, but with children "it crashes down around you how serious it is," says Ornati.

Her husband-to-be, Thomas Zimny, was raised a Catholic but was interested in having their son, 4-year-old Hunter, raised as a Jew.

Ornati thought she didn't know enough about her own heritage to be able to make that commitment.

Coming from "a highly assimilated family," Ornati says, she had "a sentimental attachment to Judaism with a vague sense of moral and political values.

"I wanted to gain a real knowledge of the literature and of specific notions of God and faith."

Her class was led by a Reform rabbi, held in a Conservative synagogue and was sponsored by the Brownstone Brooklyn Jewish Coalition, a consortium of liberal synagogues and havurot in the area.

The newest twist in the trend of adult education is an effort to bring Jewish education to the workplace.

Melton is hoping to start up its course in September at the massive Microsoft campus in suburban Seattle, where there are some 13,000 employees, roughly 10 percent of whom are Jewish.

Similarly, Lehrhaus plans to offer Jewish learning on-site at computer firms in the Silicon Valley.

The goal, organizers say, is to reach people in their 20s, the population that is currently proving the most elusive to educators. □

JEWISH WORLD

Sanctions vote postponed

Republican leaders in the U.S. Congress agreed to indefinitely postpone a vote to override President Clinton's veto of a bill that would impose sweeping sanctions on Russia for supplying missile technology to Iran.

The move came in response to Clinton's executive order to impose sanctions on Russian companies and institutions that Moscow itself began investigating. The postponement was widely supported by Jewish groups, led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, despite the fact that they had lobbied heavily for the legislation.

Swiss bankers deny report

The Swiss Bankers Association denied a German newspaper report that it was prepared to double to \$1.2 billion the amount Swiss banks are willing to pay to settle Holocaust-era claims. A spokesman for the banks called the report a "cruel hoax." Settlement talk between the banks and Jewish representatives broke down last month after the banks said that \$600 million was their best offer.

Protesters: Strip Papon's honors

Relatives of Holocaust victims staged a protest in Paris to demand that the Legion of Honor be stripped from Maurice Papon. Papon received the award, among France's highest civilian decorations, several times during his postwar career as Paris police chief and French budget minister. He was found guilty in April of complicity in crimes against humanity and sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in the deportation of Jews from southwest France between 1942 and 1944. He will not serve his sentence until all his appeals are exhausted.

Hungarian synagogue dedicated

Hungarian Jews joined teen-agers from across Central Europe to inaugurate the first synagogue built in the country since the Holocaust.

The synagogue, part of an educational center at a Jewish summer camp in the southern Hungarian town of Szarvas, was built with funds from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

HIAS begins new program

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society is teaming with Jewish federation agencies to begin providing legal services to refugees and immigrants in Philadelphia.

Under the new project, HIAS will begin taking green card applications for the refugees it sponsors and also help with the completion of citizenship applications.

Designing the adult chair: Educators teach the grown-ups

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Squishing a 6-foot, 200-pound adult body into a kindergartner's classroom chair doesn't make for a very comfortable learning environment. So a Baltimore synagogue decided to do something about it.

Congregation Chizuk Amuno recently put the finishing touches on a special room just for adult education. Large and flooded with natural light, the room is decorated in a pleasing palette of plums, grays and blues, and is furnished with comfortable furniture designed for grown-up bodies. Each solidly built chair has arms, as well as a seat and back padded with tapestry-like fabric.

Tables are designed to fit together in a circle, and to separate when pairs of adults study as a duo in the traditional Jewish learning model known as hevruta.

While Chizuk Amuno may be ahead of the curve in designing a special room for grown-up learners, it is not alone in developing new approaches and techniques to the burgeoning field of adult Jewish education. A whole new discipline, in fact, is evolving.

Judy Meltzer, director of adult learning at Chizuk Amuno, a Conservative congregation of 1,500 families, was hired two years ago as the synagogue's first professional devoted to adult education.

The special room is designed to be as conducive to learning as possible, says Meltzer.

"There needs to be great respect for the comfort level of the adult learner who has come to learn what has been forgotten or never learned at all," she says.

To further foster the growing attention to adult education, the Alliance for Adult Jewish Learning was created in March after those involved in the field gathered for a conference in Washington, D.C.

The new alliance anticipates bringing together professionals for an annual conference.

One aspect its members expect to take advantage of is in-service training for teachers of adult Jews.

One member of the alliance, the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, is based in Jerusalem and as of this fall, is expected to provide courses for some 2,500 Jewish adults in 34 American communities.

In each city or town, Melton staff members help develop awareness among educators of pedagogical techniques, student-teacher relationships and the impact of education, according to Betsy Dolgin Katz, Melton's North American director.

"We believe that teaching adults needs to become a profession," says Dolgin Katz, who is chairing the new Alliance for Adult Jewish Learning. Another area of concern is preparing rabbis and cantors to gear their teaching to adults.

"Most of the adult Jewish learning activities are led and taught by pulpit personnel, who have little if any training in this area," says Paul Flexner, director of human resources development at JESNA, the Jewish Education Service of North America.

"If we want to make a difference, we need to somehow reach the rabbis, in particular, with new approaches on teaching adults, and to help them think about what their purposes are in the teaching and learning process," he says.

In this area, in particular, Flexner believes, "we still have a long way to go." □

Orthodox protest restaurant

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some 200 fervently Orthodox Jews clashed with police during a demonstration Saturday night in Jerusalem against a new restaurant doing business on the Sabbath.

Some of the protesters shouted "Shabbas, Shabbas" while overturning trash cans and throwing stones at police. Five demonstrators were arrested for throwing stones at police from a rooftop.

The chef at Cafe Fresco, whose menu includes non-kosher seafood, was quoted as saying that the restaurant would remain open on the Sabbath. □

Israelis, Palestinians meet in shadow of bombing attempt

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Observers from both sides of the divide were expecting little to emerge as Israeli and Palestinian officials held their highest-level meeting in months.

As though the gloomy predictions were not enough, the talks that occurred Sunday in Tel Aviv between Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, took place in the shadow of an attempted terror bombing in the heart of Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his Cabinet before the negotiations began that he intends to reach an agreement with the Palestinians as soon as possible. But Palestinian officials charged that Netanyahu was using the talks as a pretext for postponing a further redeployment in the West Bank.

Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath said Sunday that the talks had a "very, very limited chance of success."

The talks were held at the urging of the United States, which called on the two sides to resolve their differences regarding a U.S. proposal under which Israel would redeploy from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank and the Palestinians would take additional steps to crack down on terror. In an indication of what was at stake in the talks, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk warned last Friday of an "explosive situation" if the talks fail.

When Sunday's more-than-three-hour session ended, Mordechai said the two sides had agreed to set up three negotiating teams, adding that he and Abbas would meet again this week.

Just hours before Sunday's talks began, Israeli police and firefighters prevented the detonation of an explosive-laden van near Zion Square.

The van, driven by a Palestinian man, caught fire before the explosives could be detonated, according to Jerusalem Police Chief Yair Yitzhaki. Passers-by rescued the driver and called security officials, who discovered the explosives. Israeli officials blamed Hamas for the attempted bombing. A Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip said he had no knowledge of the planned attack.

Arafat condemned the attack during a meeting with Israeli peace groups in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The van's driver was identified as Jallal Rumaneh, a known Hamas activist in his early 30s. Rumaneh managed to enter the city despite a ban limiting his movement. Eight years ago, Rumaneh was sentenced to 20 months in prison for belonging to a "hostile organization."

Netanyahu refrained from blaming the attempted bombing on the Palestinian Authority.

But at a news conference in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said the attempted attack proved that Israel had a strong basis for demanding that the Palestinian Authority intensify its war against terrorism — "so that territories which will be handed to them will not turn into terrorist bases."

Netanyahu, who said he was hopeful of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians, also hinted at a possible summit with Arafat.

Arafat echoed the Israeli premier's optimism.

At the meeting with representatives of 22 Israeli peace groups, Arafat said he was confident that peace would eventually be achieved "because the people in Israel wanted so."

Immediately after the van's explosives were discovered, Israeli security forces launched an intensive investigation into how the booby-trapped car was able to make its way into the heart of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem police intensified security measures to prevent other potential sabotage attempts. A security alert was also announced in Tel Aviv. □

Anti-Semitic canards alive as Russia buries final czar

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The burial of Russia's last imperial family — intended to be a moment of national reconciliation — instead has fueled a national controversy that included some familiar anti-Jewish canards.

President Boris Yeltsin made a surprise, last-minute decision to attend last Friday's burial of the remains of Czar Nicholas II, who along with his wife Alexandra, their children and servants, was shot by a Bolshevik firing squad in the summer of 1918.

But the Russian Orthodox Church, which does not acknowledge the veracity of DNA tests establishing that remains found seven years ago in the city of Yekaterinburg are indeed those of Nicholas and his family, boycotted the event.

Shortly after the fate of the family became known, a rumor spread that Jews were responsible for the death of the czar. Supporters of the conspiracy theory rely on the fact that many of the early Bolsheviks were of Jewish origin — including the head of the firing squad that shot the royal family.

The burial rekindled these theories once again.

"Regardless of the fuss made by the government and the Jew Nemtsov, for Orthodox people the funeral will virtually not exist," Alexander Rakov, editor of a Russian Orthodox newspaper in St. Petersburg, said in an interview on the eve of the ceremony.

Rakov was referring to Boris Nemtsov, the Russian deputy prime minister who headed a government commission that used historical and forensic arguments to dispel the version of the deaths that holds Jews responsible.

A placard at a hard-line monarchist and Christian rally held two days before the remains were buried read "Satanic Regime — Satanic Rituals," a thinly veiled attack on an imagined Jewish plot against the czar and church. And Sergei Khazanov-Pashkovsky, an activist with St. Petersburg's leading monarchist group, the Russian Imperial Union-Order, echoed the traditional cry of many Russian anti-Semites when he claimed recently that both the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions were financed with Jewish money.

With security tight, Friday's burial passed without incident.

Jewish leaders, who welcomed the burial, have generally kept a low profile on the controversy, but the Jewish significance of the event was not forgotten. The czar was killed, as were "thousands of families in the Jewish pogroms of 1905 — which were encouraged by the czarist police," Leonid Radzikhovsky, a columnist for the Segodnya newspaper, wrote last Thursday.

"This does not make the fate of the czar's family less tragic, but we should not forget that this controversial man, who later became a victim himself, looked approvingly" on anti-Jewish violence, said Tovy Norkin, a retired history teacher who lives in Moscow. □