



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 155

Monday, August 24, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

German firms may settle

A leading German bank and several of the country's insurance firms are said to be close to accepting a settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

Deutsche Bank is reportedly planning to meet with Jewish officials soon to discuss a possible settlement.

The bank, along with Dresdner Bank, faces an \$18 billion class-action lawsuit over allegations they knowingly laundered gold and other valuables stripped from concentration camp victims.

Meanwhile, German insurers held negotiations over the weekend to reach a settlement, a German newspaper reported.

Suit filed against Degussa

A class-action lawsuit was filed in New Jersey against German metals refiner Degussa and its U.S. subsidiary.

The suit claims the company smelted gold taken from Holocaust victims and helped the Nazis produce the cyanide used in the death camps.

The suit seeks all the assets of Degussa, whose annual worldwide sales are estimated at \$9 billion.

Tensions erupt in Hebron

Jewish settlers and Palestinians threw eggs and rocks at one another in the West Bank town of Hebron.

The tensions erupted in the wake of last week's slaying of Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anan.

Meanwhile, a militant Jewish settler confronted Israeli President Ezer Weizman with shouts that he was a spy and a "danger to the public" who needed to be "institutionalized either in prison or hospital."

Baruch Marzel, who had been a member of the now-outlawed Kach movement, had waited on a street for Weizman, who was on his way to pay a condolence call to Ra'anan's family. [Page 3]

Israel plans increased security

Israel's army is reportedly planning to erect fences around 20 West Bank settlements. The plan came following intelligence assessments that Hamas militants have targeted Jewish settlers.

Army leaves have been canceled and tanks were placed on alert in anticipation of attacks on settlements. [Page 3]

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Museum promotes identity among Jewish teens through arts program

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Asking questions is an important part of Judaism.

And this summer they were central to an arts program at The Jewish Museum here that was aimed at fostering Jewish identity among teen-agers.

"Layers," an exhibit of artworks produced by the teens that opened at the museum earlier this month, reflects the blending of art and identity.

"It's all about looking at who you are," Aaron Roller, 16, said as he stood beside his Chanukah lamp composed of miniature portraits of dancing rabbis with clay fedoras for candle holders.

For four weeks, 14 teen artists studied under working painters, printmakers, sculptors and videographers.

They met with curators, explored museums and visited artists' studios as part of the museum's program for New York-area teens.

And all the time, they asked questions: "Is this good art?" "Does it belong in a museum?" "Does anybody want gum?"

But perhaps the most important questions the group of Jewish high school students addressed were, "How does our identity relate to our own art? How does it relate to other people's art?"

Integrating art and Jewish content is the program's main goal, one that represents a growing trend in programming for Jewish youth: appealing to teens' hobbies and interests — from the arts to sports to ecology — as a way to encourage commitment in the years following a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, when many young Jews fall away from active Jewish life.

"We wanted to give kids who are really interested in art the opportunity to do it in a Jewish context," the museum's director explained.

"And kids who are Jewishly identified could be exposed to art opportunities they wouldn't be otherwise," said Joan Rosenbaum.

She credits her career choice to early experiences at her local art museum and classes at the nearby Jewish community center.

SummerArts was her way of bringing those influences together for a new generation.

Recent studies of Jewish youth initiatives have called on communities nationwide to devote more resources to the needs of teens, and to make a range of Jewish experiences available to Jewish youth.

Sponsored in part by Jewish Continuity Funds from the UJA-Federation of Philanthropies of New York, the SummerArts program, now in its second year, is intended not just as an arts experience but also as "a forum for issues of identity."

"We're planting seeds, having them start examining their own world," said Amy Trachtenberg, the program's coordinator.

Across the country, many Jewish Community Centers and some Jewish museums — the B'nai Brith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Meisel Museum of Jewish Art in Denver, for example — offer one-day art workshops for adolescents.

Genesis, a teen summer program at Brandeis University, also combines Jewish content with the arts and humanities.

But SummerArts organizers maintain that their program is uniquely effective,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Reported progress denied

Palestinian officials refuted reports in the Israeli press that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had confirmed in writing that he was ready for a 13 percent further redeployment in the West Bank.

The officials said Netanyahu's government had leaked the false reports in order to put pressure on the Palestinians to accept Israeli terms for the redeployment. Aides to Netanyahu had no comment about the reports.

Palestinians protest air strikes

Palestinians demonstrated over the weekend in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to protest last week's U.S. air strikes against suspected terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. Ahmed Abdel Rahman, secretary-general of the Palestinian Cabinet, criticized the attack, saying it "will bring the world back to the rule of the jungle."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied reports that Israeli and U.S. intelligence agencies had shared extensive information on the infrastructure of Islamic terrorist networks during the planning stages of the raid.

Nablus compromise reached

The Palestinian Authority and Israel reached a compromise that allows a group of settlers to remain until September in Joseph's Tomb in the Palestinian-controlled city of Nablus. The Israeli army gave the group permission to stay overnight in the holy site after terrorists on Aug. 4 killed two settlers from Yizhar. Palestinian officials protested, fearing that the group would attempt to set up a new settlement.

Tel Aviv beaches closed

Israeli authorities banned swimming at Tel Aviv beaches after a sewage spill polluted the water. Israel has been plagued during the past week by sewage spills in Eilat, Haifa and Tel Aviv.



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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because it exposes participants to the museum's extensive collections of archaeology, ritual objects, fine arts and contemporary painting and sculpture, puts students in contact with successful Jewish artists and experienced teachers, and brings students from diverse Jewish backgrounds together.

"None of my friends are doing anything like this," said Judith Kaplan, 16, of Long Island, who woke at 6:00 a.m. each morning to reach the museum by 9:30.

"None of my friends are Jewish. I really wanted to meet Jewish kids."

Many of Kaplan's fellow fledgling artists — a third of the group attends Jewish day schools and two are Russian immigrants — agreed that expanding their social circles was as important a consideration in signing on for the program as was enhancing their artistic abilities.

And SummerArts participants noted a lively exchange of ideas across denominational lines — with topics ranging from feminism and morality to kashrut and Jewish stereotypes — as one of the program's most effective aspects in transforming their conceptions of Jewish identity.

"We're not all Orthodox and that's different than you'd get at another place," said Jillian Copeland, a 16-year-old sculptor from Manhattan, speaking about teen programs, including Israel-experience trips sponsored by synagogue groups.

Steven Serels, 15, a yeshiva student from New Rochelle, a suburb north of New York, observed that socializing with secular Jews his age had allowed him to "speak about religion without being annoyingly patronizing or assuming they don't know anything."

Besides looking outward, however, students were looking ahead.

Na'ama Fogel, 16, whose yeshiva, she said, does not have a rigorous art program, was drawn to SummerArts as a way to bolster her applications to art programs at universities.

Teachers — like Ken Aptekar, whose overtly Jewish paintings sell to a broad audience, and Jane Kent, who is publishing a book of her prints — served as artistic and professional role models.

Participating students said Aptekar and Kent "make money; they have respect" and are "doing real things."

Figuring out how to communicate Jewish identity is integral to Aptekar's work, which incorporates words and images in different media.

"I tried to push them to engage with the questions," Aptekar said of the SummerArts students.

"Once they lent themselves to it, they came up with their own responses to the conflict of how others define us and how we define ourselves."

Discussions with established artists, including the sculptor George Segal, further illustrated the viability of an artistic career that deals squarely with Jewish themes.

And access to the museum's vast collections provided another essential element of the SummerArts program: an expanded definition of art and Jewish culture.

"So they don't think of Jewish art as a menorah," one museum educator said.

Tobi Khan, the leader of weekly sessions on ceremonial art, encouraged students to break free from traditional ideas of ritual objects, both in form and in purpose.

"We want to give them a visual, positive Jewish experience without telling them, 'Do this, do that,'" said Khan, whose own ceremonial art is currently in a traveling exhibition in the United States.

In response to Khan's challenge, the teens devised innovative pieces, such as a yahrzeit lamp formed from empty wine bottles — titled "A Toast to His Memory" — and an abstract history of Jewish migration composed of multicolored baubles and shiny brooches representing "streets paved with gold."

Pircha Africk's Havdalah spice box — painted black and topped with a thick coat of sparkling purple nail polish — took its title, "Welcome to the Dollhouse" from a recent independent film about teen-age angst.

Viewing works by Chaim Soutine and Marc Chagall in the museum's galleries inspired some of the paintings by Alina Sirota, who had not realized some of her favorite painters were Jewish.

The 16-year-old Russian immigrant, who lives in the Bronx, exclaimed: "To know somebody else like me is an artist, it's great!" □

JEWISH WORLD

Hebron tensions escalate after settler rabbi murdered

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The murder of a rabbi in Hebron has cast a pall over already embittered Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The Aug. 20 murder, which sparked weekend clashes in the often volatile West Bank town, prompted several Israeli ministers to call during Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting for a total suspension of already-deadlocked talks with the Palestinian Authority.

The government also called on Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to condemn the murder of Rabbi Shlomo Ra'an. Arafat has refused to condemn the recent murders of settlers. Some Palestinian officials have stated that while they are ready to condemn terror attacks on Israelis, settlers fall into a different category because of what the officials describe as their provocative behavior.

Israeli security experts suspected that Hamas was behind Ra'an's murder. They said they believed Hamas would choose more settler targets because of a consensus among Palestinians that attacks against settlers are legitimate.

Earlier this month, two settlers from Yizhar, Shlomo Liebman and Harel Bin-Nun, were killed by suspected Palestinian terrorists.

Although the Palestinian Authority refused Israel's demand to condemn the latest slaying, diplomatic sources in Jerusalem said Israel would not suspend the negotiations.

But political observers said the latest developments made it clear that there was little chance of rescuing the talks from their current stalemate.

Security measures were stepped up around West Bank Jewish settlements in the wake of Ra'an's murder in Hebron's Tel Rumeida enclave.

Israel's army is reportedly planning to erect fences around 20 settlements in the wake of intelligence assessments that Hamas militants have targeted Jewish settlers.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Sunday that he was authorizing the construction of permanent structures at Tel Rumeida.

A secluded Jewish neighborhood located on a hill, Tel Rumeida overlooks the center of Hebron and its Jewish quarter. Although the local Jewish community had purchased the land in the 19th century, it was not until 1984 that the Israeli government allowed a limited Jewish presence at the site. Since then, the government has refrained from authorizing any expansion of the two-acre site, where seven families live in mobile homes. The authorities had banned the construction there of any permanent housing — a policy reversed by Netanyahu's announcement.

Hours after the slaying, Israeli troops sealed off Hebron to search for the Palestinian suspected of killing Ra'an. Ra'an's grandfather was Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hachohen Kook, who helped inspire the modern-day settlers movement.

According to police, the attacker climbed through a window into Ra'an's trailer, stabbed him several times, then threw a firebomb into the living room.

The rabbi's wife escaped through a window but suffered smoke inhalation.

Tensions ran high in Hebron after Ra'an's murder, with Jewish settlers and Palestinians throwing eggs and rocks at one another Sunday across the divide separating the areas controlled by Israel and the self-rule authority.

Israeli troops forced back about 25 settlers attempting to cross into the Palestinian-controlled section. The troops also clashed with Palestinians throwing rocks and gasoline bombs. Palestinian police eventually pushed back the Arab demonstrators.

In an effort to restore calm to the city, the army reinstated a guard post in Tel Rumeida and sent in more troops.

In a related development, a militant Jewish settler confronted President Ezer Weizman in Hebron with shouts that he was a spy and a "danger to the public" who needed to be "institutionalized either in prison or hospital." Baruch Marzel, who had been a member of the now-outlawed Kach movement, had waited on a street for Weizman, who was on his way to pay a condolence call to Ra'an's family.

Israeli observers compared Marzel's taunts to the incitement that preceded the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. □

Swiss bank refuses participation

Switzerland's central bank decided it would not contribute to a \$1.25 billion global settlement that the country's two largest commercial banks agreed to pay Holocaust survivors. In announcing the decision, the bank's 40-member board said it rejected the jurisdiction of the U.S. court overseeing the settlement.

Jewish groups hail air strikes

U. S. Jewish groups unanimously hailed President Clinton's decision to attack suspected terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan. "The war against terrorism must be a priority for all civilized nations. Allowed to go unchecked, it endangers the citizens of every country," the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said in a statement.

Swiss police on alert

Swiss police are on alert after authorities received intelligence information that the deputy of Osama bin Laden may be in the country.

The deputy was identified as Ayman Zawhari, an Egyptian national wanted for terrorist activities. U.S. officials say they have evidence that bin Laden and his followers were responsible for the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania earlier this month.

Kohl rejects Holocaust fund

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl rejected a proposal by German companies to create a new joint Holocaust fund.

Federal coffers are firmly shut to any more reparations payments stemming from the Nazi era, Kohl said. Germany has paid more than \$55.5 billion since the end of World War II in various forms of Holocaust compensation.

ADL applauds sentence

The Anti-Defamation League applauded the conviction of a former imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan for the 1966 murder of civil rights activist Vernon Dahmer Jr.

"Justice has finally been achieved," the ADL said after Samuel Bowers was led away in handcuffs last Friday to begin serving a life sentence for orchestrating the murder.

Four trials of Bowers during the 1960s ended with deadlocked juries.

Berkeley store vandalized

Vandals painted a swastika in front of a book store in Berkeley, Calif., and broke its windows.

The store's owner, who received a postcard calling him a "cancerous Jew," believes the attack is tied to his opposition to loitering by homeless people.

Rabbis cross denomination lines to break down barriers of rhetoric

By Julie Gruenbaum Fax

Jewish Journal of Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — One of them calls himself a hard-liner. Another says he doesn't believe in pluralism. Still another admits he has never actually called a woman a rabbi.

And yet these Orthodox rabbis, along with an impressive list of others, have spent several evenings during the past few months sitting with Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis figuring out how to tone down the rhetoric and turn up the level of respect among Jews with sharply differing beliefs.

"This group has a different focus from other attempts," says Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, director of the Jewish Studies Institute of Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

"Nobody has any interest in persuading anybody to modify his or her stance.

"We are dealing with a lot of strong-willed people who are not in any mood to budge on principles, but who feel strongly that Jews can treat each other with respect even when we disagree to the core."

The rabbis involved consider themselves civilians — all represent only themselves and have left institutional affiliation behind.

And the group, which recently named itself Darchei Shalom, or Paths of Peace, is, by its own admission, highly limited in its goals.

There is no pretense of pluralism, no discussion of the great debates ripping at the Jewish people, such as the conversion controversy in Israel.

Rather, as a statement signed by 40 prominent Los Angeles rabbis attests, the goal is simply to "explore ways in which to change the often shrill and derogatory way that many of us treat the 'other.'"

The statement outlines a code "to govern the way we speak and write about each other."

At first glance, the code reads almost like the rules on a sixth grade bulletin board.

"Address issues rather than people. Avoid stereotyping and sweeping generalities, such as defining whole groups by the behavior of some. Avoid words of incitement. Language meant merely to mock, deride and insult should never be used," states the code.

But, basic as the rabbis' statement seems, "I wonder if we could get 60 members of the Israeli Knesset to sign on to it," says Adlerstein.

In fact, the impetus for the group stems from some of the abusive and increasingly uncivil language heard among Jewish leaders in Israel and the United States.

Dr. Bill Bender, a veterinarian, spent much of last year's High Holidays thinking about the bickering. Bender's rabbi, Solomon Rothstein — a conflict resolution expert — had spoken about the issue at services, and Bender approached him afterward looking for ways to help.

With the assistance of Rabbi Paul Dubin, then executive director of the Southern California Board of Rabbis, Bender contacted local rabbis from across the denominations.

He invited them to a meeting to explore ways to change the way Jews speak to each other.

Rabbi Aron Tendler, a teacher at Yeshiva University of Los Angeles high school and rabbi of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in North Hollywood, says one of the reasons he so readily agreed to participate was because the request came from a concerned Jew, someone without the baggage of institutional affiliation.

"I felt that the goal was really a proper one and an appropriate one and one that everybody could concur with," says Rabbi Elazar Muskin, leader of Young Israel of Century City.

"We're not talking halachah, or debating where we differ. We're trying to work to treat each other with mutual respect, and that would benefit the Jewish community at large."

Participating in interdenominational halachic dialogues or debates has long been seen by some in the Orthodox community as lending validation to the other movements by placing them on seemingly equal footing as Orthodoxy.

For Rabbi Janet Marder, director of the Reform movement's Western region of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, it is the overriding concern for Jewish unity that allows her to overlook the limited scope of the group, though she herself would like to see more theological dialogue.

"I hope those in the Orthodox community will come to appreciate that there are significant numbers of liberal Jews who are serious about Torah and learning and observance and continuity," she says.

"And I hope those in my community will learn that the Orthodox are not demonic, not necessarily filled with hatred and contempt for Reform Jews."

Making those inroads is beginning with Darchei Shalom, where establishing personal contact has been a major force in "de-demonizing" the other, says Tendler.

While there was some initial tension at the first meeting, that broke down quickly as honesty about fundamental differences and a strong mutual respect emerged.

Orthodox rabbis participating in the meeting realized that "the people who lead the other denominations are sincere," says Tendler.

"I don't agree with their approach, and not necessarily with their goals.

"But I do agree with their sincerity. They feel for the Jewish people, they are passionate about what they would like to do and give over to their congregants."

The group's next step will be to bring that concept to lay people.

The rabbis are currently setting up guidelines for study sessions where interdenominational groups can focus on their commonalities, rather than their differences.

Even such benign activities could raise some eyebrows on the right end of the Orthodox spectrum, where any religious communication with other denominations is viewed as breaking down important walls.

But those involved hope naysayers will realize that these rabbis are committed to holding firm to their form of Judaism — and that the unity of the Jewish people is paramount.

Adlerstein sees the dialogue as holy work.

"We all have this feeling that there is something special about being Jewish that pulls at our heartstrings whenever we are dealing with other Jews," he says. □