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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

2 Turkish Jews die in earthquake

Two vacationing Jews from Istanbul and 25 Israeli tourists were killed in last week's devastating earthquake in Turkey, according to the World Jewish Congress.

Despite the deaths and scope of the tragedy, most Jewish citizens of Turkey emerged largely unscathed.

But the Jewish community — which numbers about 23,000 people, mostly in the Turkish capital of Istanbul — is still shaken, and is helping with the relief effort. [Page 4]

Sheinbein to plead guilty

The U.S. teen-ager who fled to Israel after allegedly committing a murder in September 1997 will plead guilty in an Israeli court next month, according to a prosecutor in the United States.

Samuel Sheinbein will be sentenced to 24 years in an Israeli prison as part of his plea bargain, according to Maryland State's Attorney Douglas Gansler.

Last month Sheinbein, who is being tried in Israel because his father was born in prestate Palestine, pleaded not guilty to murdering Alfred Tello Jr. in suburban Maryland.

Student can wear Jewish star

A Mississippi school board overturned its decision to bar a Jewish student from displaying a Star of David symbol in class.

The Harrison County School Board, which had said the six-pointed star violated school policy because it could be construed as a gang symbol, reversed its decision Monday following an outcry from religious leaders around the country and a threatened lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union. [Page 3]

Yeshiva committee draws fire

Coalition and opposition legislators in Israel demanded that Prime Minister Ehud Barak alter the makeup of a newly appointed committee on the drafting of yeshiva students into the army.

The critics claim the body, which has a majority of observant members, would simply grant army exemptions to the students.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv quoted a source close to the prime minister as responding to the critics by saying that all but two of the 10 committee members had done active army duty.

BACK TO THE BOOKS

Opening of new Reform day schools signals growth along with ambivalence

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — In many ways, Rodeph Sholom School looks like any other elite Manhattan private school.

Walls are covered with colorful student art and the small courtyard playground is meticulously maintained. Dressed-for-success, cellphone-toting parents clamor into the kindergarten classroom for a special program in which their children show off what they have learned about dinosaurs.

But alongside the pictures of nature and New York hang crayoned illustrations of Bible stories and Jewish family trees.

At the "dinosaur breakfast," kindergartners don't just show off the fossil replicas they have created, but proudly present miniature handmade "Torah" scrolls in which there is a page about each Jewish holiday.

Rodeph Sholom — which enrolls 530 students in nursery school through sixth grade — is part of a small-but-growing network of Reform day schools that are increasingly being regarded as training grounds for the movement's future leadership.

Seen as an antidote to the Jewish community's assimilation woes, day schools — which offer secular and Judaic studies under one roof — are proliferating throughout North America. But while day schools have long been accepted in the Orthodox and Conservative communities, Reform Judaism has had a more ambivalent relationship to them. When a small group introduced the idea of Reform day schools in the 1960's, opponents argued that day schools were "inimical" to Reform Judaism, Michael Zeldin wrote in a 1997 article for a Reform Jewish publication.

"As a modernist movement committed to democratic principles and integration into the life of the community, Reform Judaism could not support a system of schools that separated Jewish children from their non-Jewish neighbors," wrote Zeldin, a professor at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, describing the opponents' argument.

At a 1969 gathering of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, leaders soundly defeated a proposal that would have encouraged the experimental development of Reform day schools.

Nonetheless, two Reform synagogues — Temple Beth Am in Miami and Rodeph Sholom — opened day schools one year later. Others gradually followed suit, and in 1985, with eight schools already in operation, the UAHC softened its stance somewhat with a resolution endorsing "the concept of autonomous, self-supporting Reform Jewish day schools as a valid educational option."

Today, the die-hard opponents have been silenced and 22 Reform day schools exist in North America, including one scheduled to open in September in Los Angeles.

Despite the changes over the last decade, Reform day schools still face problems finding broad-based support. While a new school is opening in Los Angeles, and ones in Dallas and Philadelphia are entering their second years, two other schools — Los Angeles' Temple Isaiah and Chicago's Rosenwald School — recently closed.

And in the past 15 years, Reform day schools in Detroit, New Jersey, Brooklyn and Long Island have not gotten off the ground or have broken off from the movement.

"There are still mixed feelings among Reform Jews and the Reform movement about day schools," HUC's Zeldin said in an interview.

"There's not an unequivocal endorsement of day schools as the preferred avenue

MIDEAST FOCUS

Safe-passage routes conditional

The agreements on safe-passage routes between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and a seaport in the Gaza Strip reached Monday by Israel and the Palestinians depend upon the sides resolving other disputes, according to sources in Israel's Prime Minister's Office.

Palestinian permits increased

Israel raised the number of permits for Palestinians entering Israel for work. In addition to increasing this number from 26,000 to 31,000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak also raised to 5,000 the number of Palestinian merchants granted permission to travel from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank.

Israel looking for Arab support

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy is dispatching envoys to Arab countries to present Israel's position in peace talks with the Palestinians. The ministry officials, who are traveling to Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia and the Gulf Arab states, are stressing Israel's intent to carry out the Wye accord, as well as Israel's desire to begin final-status talks soon.

Shabbat petition rejected

Israel's state attorney rejected a petition asking that the state not transport large electricity turbines on the Jewish Sabbath. The response to the petition came before an Israeli High Court hearing on the matter Wednesday.

Israeli survivors protest

Holocaust survivors in Israel are protesting a decision to reduce their insurance benefits because Germany is paying them more money. Israel's National Insurance Institute recently reduced the payments because the payments from Germany, which equal \$200 a month, placed many survivors above the \$570 monthly ceiling that would enable them to receive benefits.



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for Jewish kids, so not every school has the unqualified support of its community."

There is a growing consensus that in order to succeed, a Reform day school has to have grass-roots support and must actively engage the surrounding Reform community and Reform institutions.

"One of the lessons we've learned is that you have to begin by drawing on the Reform congregations" in the community, "giving them a sense of ownership and making people feel the school's success is dependent on them," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the UAHC and himself a vocal champion of day school education.

That may explain why the majority of Reform day schools, unlike most Orthodox and Conservative ones, operate out of temples.

Having the "security blanket" of a congregation ensures that the school has a solid base of institutional, financial and rabbinic support, said Irwin Shlachter, headmaster of New York's Rodeph Sholom.

Shlachter describes his school as one that aims to "compete effectively with the best private schools, but do the learning through Jewish eyes."

Rodeph Sholom's critics often describe it as more of a fancy school with Jewish students than a Jewish day school.

But Michelle Singer, who directs the school's Judaic studies curriculum, said the Judaic curriculum — once limited to "celebrating holidays through art projects and food" — has become quite rigorous.

"In terms of what we do in class, it's not that different from Conservative or Orthodox schools," said Singer, herself a graduate of an Orthodox day school. "We learn texts in Hebrew, have Shacharit [morning prayer] services and try to integrate the social studies curriculum with Judaic studies, so that it's woven throughout."

"We're very traditional in our teaching and practice here at school so the kids can then make educated choices about how they want to observe," she said.

How the children observe Judaism at home, rather than what they learn in school, is the major difference between Rodeph Sholom and more traditional day schools, Singer said, noting that the level of Jewish commitment varies widely among the parents, many of whom are intermarried or have limited Jewish education.

"It's a delicate balance to make sure all the parents are comfortable. A lot of parents are asking for more Hebrew and Judaic studies, but others worry about losing time for secular studies."

The changes in the school reflect a larger change in Reform Judaism, according to Shlachter. "I used to call it Judaism in the closet — don't give too much, be like other private schools. But now they want more," he said.

Shlachter and leaders of other Reform day schools believe their schools play an outreach role that more traditional day schools do not, mostly because marginally affiliated Jewish families find them less threatening.

"If a couple makes the commitment to sending their child here, then I don't question their practices at home, unless they do something like wear a cross to school," Shlachter said. "I'd rather embrace these families than know they feel excommunicated. This is our one last shot at keeping these kids Jewish."

Reform day schools vary considerably in their atmosphere, outlook and size, ranging from the 750 students at Toronto's Leo Baeck Day School to 44 at Beth Hillel Day School in Valley Village, Calif, a suburb of Los Angeles.

The schools seem to thrive more in certain regions — like the West Coast, Southwest and South — than in others, like the Midwest and East Coast.

But all wrestle with just what a Reform day school should be.

Leslie Litman, the former Judaic studies coordinator at Boston's Rashi School and now the liaison between PARDeS, the Reform day school movement, and the UAHC, said questions of how observant, or even how Jewish, a school should be often surface at the schools, particularly at new ones worried about scaring off potential parents.

"Do all kids have to wear kippot? How rigorously do we enforce whatever kashrut policy we have?" she said, adding that the "struggle between communal norms and individual rights is more prevalent in Reform day schools" than Conservative ones.

Family education programs, which many Reform day schools have, can alleviate that struggle, Litman said, noting that if less observant parents are exposed to rituals and traditions "in a non-threatening way, they'll love it and it won't be an issue." □

JEWISH WORLD

Jewish student wins right to display his Star of David

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Jewish high school student has won a standoff with Mississippi school officials over his right to display a Star of David symbol in class.

The Harrison County School Board voted unanimously Monday to exempt religious symbols from its policy that prohibits students from wearing anything that could be construed as a gang symbol.

School officials had barred 15-year-old Ryan Green from wearing the Star of David symbol — a pin given to him by his grandmother — where it could be seen because they said it could jeopardize his safety. Some gang insignias incorporate six-pointed stars, along with other symbols such as pitchforks.

The decision prompted an outcry from religious leaders around the country and a threatened lawsuit from Green's family and the American Civil Liberties Union.

"We realized that it infringed on freedom of religious expression, and that freedom supersedes the safety issues," Randy Williams, the board's president, said in explaining the board's reversal.

Jewish leaders hailed the move as an important victory for religious freedom that they hope will send a signal to other school districts around the United States that do not show enough sensitivity to the rights of religious minorities.

Although religious symbols worn by students have rarely been a source of contention, a number of controversies have been generated in recent years by student-led prayer at graduation ceremonies and at assemblies.

"We hope that this particular incident, resolved correctly in short order and with little fuss, will prevent other school districts from acting in a manner insensitive to the religious rights of students," said Nathan Diamant, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs.

Tom Green, Ryan's father, was quoted as saying, "We are truly joyous. As a father to a son this is the best principle I could teach him: Stand up for your rights." □

Advocates for arrested Iranian Jews working for quick end to investigation

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — With no formal charges brought against the 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel, their advocates are now focusing on resolving the investigation as quickly as possible and ensuring that the detainees receive a fair trial.

Leaders of American Jewish organizations had quoted official Iranian sources indicating that charges would be brought last week in court, but Iran denied any legal action had been taken against the 13, who were arrested in March.

"Hopefully the authorities will come to the conclusion that these people are innocent and that they will be released," Sam Kermanian, the secretary-general of the American Iranian Jewish Federation, said in an interview from Los Angeles.

But, he said, advocates for the prisoners from within and outside Iran are trying to ensure a proper defense for the 13, who range in age from 16 to 49.

Kermanian said an official request has been made to the Iranian government requesting legal representation for the prisoners. "We are awaiting the response of the government of Iran in that regard," Kermanian said.

He said the head of Iran's Jewish community, Parviz Yeshayaii, had been in contact with "various authorities inside the country" on behalf of the prisoners.

Legal representation is not guaranteed in Iranian courts.

Last week, the Jewish community's representative to the Iranian Parliament was quoted as calling for a speedy conclusion to the investigation as a way to stave off pressure from the West. "What we want is a quick intervention of the judiciary in this case," Manouchehr Eliasi reportedly told the Iranian newspaper Peyam-e Azadi. "The more this case lasts, the more controversy it causes." □

Coalition fights for gay rights

An interfaith coalition called for clergy to advocate for greater acceptance of gay men and lesbians in their religious communities.

Forty participants representing dozens of faith groups took part in the National Religious Leadership Roundtable, where they discussed strategies for challenging the influence of the religious right, which has mobilized in part "to impose their agenda on the rest of America," said New York-based Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, one of two rabbis to participate in the meeting in Colorado Springs.

Civil rights for homosexuals, including the right to civil marriages, was one of the central issues of the discussions.

The issue of same-sex marriage she said, "is a case where the religious right's opinion has the force of law in this country."

Money issue as slave talks begin

Talks aimed at determining how much to compensate Holocaust-era slave laborers began Tuesday in Bonn.

Jewish representatives and 16 German companies have been working in recent months to determine the companies' liability for using Nazi slave labor during World War II, and officials on both sides said they were optimistic key issues can be resolved this week.

A large gap remains, however, between the \$20 billion attorneys for Holocaust survivors have been seeking and the \$1.7 billion the German companies proposed earlier this year.

Mbeki speaks to the Jews

South African President Thabo Mbeki told the country's Jewish umbrella organization that the South African Jewish community is an "invaluable resource" to the country.

Mbeki, who wore a blue velvet yarmulka given to him for the occasion, made his comments to an audience of 1,100 at Saturday evening's opening of the biennial congress of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg.

Lauder to score touchdown?

The chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations may bid to purchase the New York Jets football team.

Ronald Lauder, the philanthropist and president of the Jewish National Fund, is one of six multimillionaires reported to be interested in buying the National Football League team for a cost expected to top \$500 million.

Lauder's office had no comment on the cosmetic heir's potential football career.

Two Turkish Jews killed in quake, community helps rebuild country

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two vacationing Jews from Istanbul and 25 Israeli tourists were killed in last week's devastating earthquake in Turkey, according to the World Jewish Congress.

Despite the deaths and scope of the tragedy, most Jewish citizens of Turkey emerged largely unscathed.

But the Jewish community — which numbers about 23,000 people, mostly in Istanbul — is still shaken, and is helping with the relief effort. "Some of us have suffered damage at plants and factories but it cannot compare to what the poor population is going through," wrote Lina Filiba, a Turkish Jewish community professional, in an e-mail message to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

There have been no reports of damage to synagogues or other Jewish institutions.

In an effort coordinated by Turkey's chief rabbi, the Jewish community collected \$50,000 for earthquake relief, said Tilda Levi, chief editor of *Shalom*, Turkey's Jewish newspaper.

According to Levi, Turkish Jews are also helping to construct prefabricated homes for the many people left homeless by the earthquake, and each day 30 to 40 Turkish Jews are volunteering as translators for international relief workers.

Jews are also involved in other relief efforts, said another *Shalom* editor, Luizet Palombo, who spent her Shabbat digging out corpses from a collapsed building with a group of co-workers from an American consulting firm.

"We still can feel that smell on our noses," she said. "I didn't lose any relatives, but I lost some friends and neighbors," she added. "Everybody lost somebody he or she knows."

The Israeli government and American Jewish community are also aiding in relief efforts. Israel sent a team of more than 200 relief workers and airlifted several plane-loads of supplies collected from Israeli citizens and corporations.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish World Service and B'nai B'rith International are collecting funds for earthquake relief. The JDC, which sends Jewish doctors to aid in relief efforts throughout the world, also has dispatched disaster relief specialist Dr. Richard Hodes to Turkey to assess medical needs. □

Expert says Israel could face major quake in next 50 years

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The damage caused by the Turkish earthquake has prodded the Israeli government into considering comprehensive plans to minimize damage if Israel, which sits on an active seismic zone, is ever hit by a large earthquake.

Last Sunday, Prime Minister Ehud Barak told the Cabinet that Israel must learn from the Turkish disaster and buildings must be built according to the highest standards.

Minister of Industry and Trade Ran Cohen appointed a committee Monday to examine to what extent industry and commerce are prepared to function in the event of an earthquake.

"We cannot let this slip through the public agenda," said Eliezer Goldberg, Israel's state comptroller.

Avi Shapira, head of the seismology division at the Geophysical Institute of Israel, which monitors earthquake activity, told the committee that there is even a small chance of an earthquake hitting Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa simultaneously.

He later told JTA that although the frequency of earthquakes in Israel is much lower than in earthquake-prone regions like Turkey, Israel is likely to get hit by a serious earthquake — above 6 on the Richter scale — within the next 50 years.

"This is an earthquake-prone country, with respect to the fact that earthquakes have occurred here in the past, and some were quite disastrous," he said, pointing out an earthquake in 1927 that caused casualties and serious damage in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Jericho and Nablus.

An earthquake in 1837 hit northern Palestine, devastating the town of Safed and leaving thousands dead.

"The Turkish earthquake was a wake-up call to Israel," Shapira said. "Everybody was watching television, and everybody was wondering how well prepared we are in case such a strong earthquake occurs in our region. Even an earthquake of this magnitude — above 7 on the Richter scale — could occur here."

Shapira said the impact of such an earthquake will depend on how far the epicenter is from populated areas. The most recent significant earthquake in Israel, which sits on the Dead Sea rift, was on Nov. 22, 1995.

The epicenter was about 60 miles south of Eilat in the Gulf of Aqaba and measured 7.1 on the Richter scale.

Since it struck relatively far from the shores of the southern resort town, nobody was killed, although some structures were damaged. □

Zubin Mehta admits he has illegitimate son living in Israel

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Conductor and musical director Zubin Mehta has admitted that he is the father of an 8-year-old illegitimate Israeli boy.

An interviewer for the London Sunday Telegraph this week mentioned rumors that Zubin Mehta had "a smattering of illegitimate children from various affairs" during the course of his 30-year marriage to former actress Nancy Kovack.

When pressed on reports of his extramarital children, Mehta admitted: "There is a child in Israel."

Asked if he and the child were close, Mehta replied: "I am getting to be close. I couldn't communicate with him because I don't speak Hebrew, but he's starting to speak English."

While Mehta, 63, does not have any children from his marriage to Kovack, he does have two by his first wife, Canadian Carmen Lasky, who is now married to his younger brother, Zarin.

Mehta launched his career as the conductor of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, where he established an international reputation, and, while still in his early 30s, became the youngest musical director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

He currently lives in Los Angeles and does the bulk of his work as the musical director of both the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and the Bavarian State Opera. □