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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Letter: Pope shouldn't be sainted

An umbrella Jewish group dealing with Jewish-Catholic relations told the Vatican that Pope Pius IX doesn't deserve to be a saint.

The protest came in a letter Wednesday from Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.

Pius IX, who became infamous for ordering the 1858 kidnap of Edgardo Mortara, a Jewish boy who had been forcibly baptized as a baby, is slated to be beatified next month, the last step before sainthood.

Senate to see bill on statehood

Two U.S. senators will introduce legislation next month that says America should not recognize a unilaterally declared Palestinian state.

The bill, sponsored by Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), also prohibits direct U.S. financial assistance to such a state and urges U.S. allies not to recognize a unilateral declaration, which Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has threatened to make on Sept. 13 if a final peace deal is not reached before then. A similar bill was introduced last month in the House.

Iran leader meets Jews

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami met with dozens of leaders and members of Iran's Jewish community in a move described in Iran as an effort to soothe communal anxiety in the wake of the July 1 conviction of 10 Jews accused of spying.

U.S. Jewish observers, however, view Khatami's actions Thursday as a public relations maneuver in the run-up to his September visit to the United Nations.

A ruling on the appeal of the Jews' case is expected Sept. 5, a day before the kickoff of the U.N. summit that Khatami is slated to attend.

Israel, Egypt discuss Jerusalem

Israel's acting foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, met with Egyptian leaders to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Ben-Ami and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak were expected Thursday to address the issue of sovereignty over Jerusalem, a key stumbling block at last month's Camp David talks. The discussions came four days before foreign ministers from 16 Islamic countries are slated to discuss the Jerusalem issue in Morocco.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

School helps haredi students join in Israel's high-tech boom

By Peter Ephross

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When the dean of the Haredi Center for Technological Studies first attempted to find jobs for his school's graduates, he met some reluctance.

The attitude was, "We'll take one of your students or two as an experiment," Rabbi Zvi Weinberger recalls of his attempts in 1996 to find jobs for his students, most of whom are fervently Orthodox — or haredi.

The reason was simple: Most workplaces are not used to hiring haredim.

Now, Weinberger says, "We have more demands than we have students to fill."

The school is a training ground for future contributors to Israel's high-tech economy. But it's also something more.

The center's 300 graduates who have found jobs are also part of an experiment to integrate members of the haredi community — who live segregated lives and do not generally serve in the country's rite of passage, the army — into mainstream Israeli society.

The debate over whether yeshiva students should serve in the army is currently being debated in the Knesset, which recently gave preliminary approval to a bill that would allow the students to be exempt from military service until age 23, when they would decide whether to continue their studies or join the military for a shortened tour of service.

Some 50 percent of the school's male students serve in the army, according to the director general of the center, Rabbi Yeheskel Fogel. Haredi women do not serve in the military.

One scholar who works with the center says it is part of a "national mission."

The program will "help not just individuals but the whole society by bridging gaps and reducing tensions," says Rabbi Daniel HersHKovitz of the mathematics faculty at the Technion — Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, which helped to develop the school's curricula and supervises some courses.

Its students appear to be looking for more tangible benefits.

On a recent afternoon, some 15 to 20 young women studied in a programming class. The class was taught by a male — the women have both male and female teachers, while only male teachers instruct the men. Most, but not all, of both genders' teachers are Orthodox.

When asked if she was concerned about having to work in the secular world, one student said she was not, but that "some girls are concerned about that and they hope to work in a religious workplace."

But she echoed the sentiments expressed by several other female students when asked why she was taking the class: "It's experience for a good-paying job."

The seed for the center was planted several years ago, when Weinberger, a product of American yeshiva training, observed what he calls a "matriarchy" among Orthodox families in Israel — the need for women to support their families because their husbands study full time in yeshivas.

"Nobody asked how come the Rambam, who was a physician, had to work for a living," says Weinberger, referring to the medieval scholar who is one of Judaism's most influential thinkers.

More than half of all haredim live below Israel's poverty line, according to a 1997 study by the Jerusalem Institute for Research, as compared with 24 percent of Israeli

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel complains to U.N.

The Israeli army submitted 127 complaints to United Nations peacekeepers this week over alleged border violations from Lebanon.

The protests included stone-throwing incidents along the border, which the army said disrupts the lives of residents of northern Israel and prevents construction of a new border fence.

Peres criticizes Barak on peace

Former Israeli prime minister and Oslo peace deal architect Shimon Peres is privately criticizing Prime Minister Ehud Barak for "mishandling" the peace process, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The paper said Thursday that Peres believes the focus at the Camp David summit on sovereignty over Jerusalem's Old City was a "recipe for impasse."

Hamas leader denies link

The leader of Hamas denied that it has ties to Osama bin Laden.

The denial by Sheik Ahmad Yassin came after Israel arrested 23 members of the militant group, some of whom Israel said studied terror techniques with the Saudi terrorist mastermind's group.

Israeli-Palestinian trade flat

Trade between Israel and the Palestinian Authority totaled \$1 billion during the first half of the year, according to the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce. The total was the same as for the same period during 1999, the group said.

Australia opens West Bank office

Australia is opening an office in the West Bank to further its relations with the Palestinian Authority.

The move comes three months after Prime Minister John Howard became the first Australian leader to meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Arabs, 14 percent of new immigrants and 13 percent of Sephardim.

When Weinberger headed the Jerusalem College of Technology from 1985 to 1993, he was frustrated by the lack of haredi students there.

"I saw the need. I saw that haredi students could not be accepted" because of a lack of formal high school training "and it aggravated me very much," says Weinberger, who immigrated to Israel in 1956.

Weinberger established the school with funding from a private donor in New York.

He first went to leading rabbis in the community to receive their blessing. "Otherwise," as Fogel puts it, "I'm afraid it could not happen."

The rabbis even approved Internet use, which has been a controversial issue in the fervently Orthodox community — as long as general browsing was not allowed.

"The Internet is not allowed at home. But at work or at studies, it's OK," says Fogel.

The rabbis, several of whom sit on the school's board, support the school's mission, but "they're not interested in emptying out the yeshivot," says Weinberger.

As a result, men, who make up 60 percent of the student body, study at night after their yeshiva studies are over — and women during the day.

The school has had little problem attracting students.

In its first year, 1996, some 35 students attended the center's first two branches, in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak. This year, some 1,200 men and women — the average student is between 25-40, poor, married and has several children — took courses at one of the school's five branches.

In addition to preparatory classes, including a high school equivalency program, the center also offers courses in specific subjects, such as programming languages.

Students can also enroll in an 18-month program, directed by the Technion, in subjects such as computers, business or office management; and a three-year program in applied engineering supervised by the Israeli Ministry of Labor. Last fall, the center launched its first four-year program, affiliated with Weinberger's former school, the Jerusalem College of Technology.

The school hopes to eventually become independent and grant its own degrees.

An average of 96% of students passed state-sponsored exams in courses ranging from English to computers in 1998 and 1999, according to the school.

Weinberger attributes this success rate to the seriousness of the students enrolled, who must follow a strict dress code. While single women are accepted into the school, single men are not.

"Anyone coming in through these doors is interested in the matter of study — and that and that alone," says Weinberger.

The school's success can also be measured in more symbolic ways, says the principal of the school's Jerusalem branch.

"When men first came, they hid their faces on the way to school. Now they proudly show their folders that have the name of the school on it," says Aryeh Charbit. □

(JTA staff writer Peter Ephross recently visited Russia and Israel on a trip sponsored by the American Society for Technion — Israel Institute of Technology.)

Temple Mount plan sidestepped

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Chief Rabbinical Council has postponed a debate on a proposal to build a synagogue at what is perhaps the most sensitive site in the Middle East — Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Instead, the council, which is the top policy-making body for Israel's Orthodox establishment, recently appointed a special committee on to study the matter.

In an indication of how charged the proposal is, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, the senior Islamic official there, warned that building the synagogue would start a war "that only God knows where it would lead."

The site of the First and Second Temples, the Temple Mount is now where the Al-Aksa Mosque and Dome of the Rock shrine are located. It is regarded as the third holiest site in Islam. The synagogue proposal was made by the chief rabbi of Haifa, Sha'ar Yishuv Cohen, a longtime supporter of letting Jews pray at the Temple Mount.

He is reported to have evidence that a synagogue existed there following the destruction of the Temples. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Olympics measures praised

Australian Jewish leaders are praising efforts to provide security at the upcoming Sydney Olympics.

Builders began reinforcing the Israeli Consulate to prepare against any possible terrorist attack at the Games, which begin Sept. 15. last month, Australia deported five people with connections to Middle East extremist groups.

Swiss firms join German fund

Six more Swiss firms joined an approximately \$5 billion German fund to compensate World War II-era slave and forced laborers. The moves by Roche, Ciba Speciality Chemicals, Holderbank, Kuehne & Nagel, Ascom and Swisscom/Debitel brings the total number of Swiss firms participating in the fund to 11.

Effort backs sports prayers

Communities across the southern United States are planning "spontaneous" prayer at school football games, as reported by The Associated Press.

The grass-roots effort comes in response to a June ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court barring prayer at public school sporting events.

"They can shut their ears or go somewhere else," one Southern football fan said of those who don't want to pray.

German banks close accounts

Two German banks are closing accounts held by a far-right political party.

The moves against the National Democratic Party, part of a broader crackdown against extremism in Germany, are being made in response to a recent surge of xenophobic violence.

Slovakia may not mint coin

Slovakia is reconsidering whether it will mint a commemorative coin of children's book author Ludo Ondrejov after an outcry that he participated in a wartime drive to remove Jews from their jobs and confiscate their property.

According to Radio Free Europe, Ondrejov was given the Jewish-owned Steiner Bookshop when it was seized, and later dismissed the Steiners as employees. Members of the family were later deported to Poland and never returned.

Film chronicles E. Europe tour

A documentary on a Boston-based Jewish chorus that toured Eastern Europe is being aired on U.S. public television. "Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland" chronicles the troupe, which was founded in Lodz, Poland, in 1899.

The program is being aired throughout the United States during August.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Rabbi builds educational center to help Slovaks rediscover Judaism

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — For Slovakia's chief rabbi, Baruch Myers, summer camps are anything but an excuse to soak up the sun.

They are a key element in the U.S.-born rabbi's mission to reach out to Slovak Jews whose families lost touch with their heritage after the Holocaust.

The Chabad rabbi has been running summer camps since arriving in the Slovak capital of Bratislava in 1993.

But this year's session was especially significant for Myers because it was held for the first time in a new 600-square-yard educational center he and his wife recently set up in the capital.

Thirty children, ranging in age from 2 to 12, spent two weeks at the center in July.

The program combines camp activities with Jewish education.

They're introduced to simple Jewish prayers before and after meals, and are taught about Jewish festivals and traditions.

The camps offer Myers a way to attract assimilated Jews.

Although Bratislava has an official Jewish community of just 400, hundreds more are thought to have abandoned their Jewish heritage or simply refused to acknowledge it publicly.

"In some ways, the camp is a centerpiece of our educational program," Myers said. "It is a very short commitment, it is fun and it is a nonthreatening start to joining the program."

"It is leading some parents to enroll" their children "in our kindergarten because they gain faith in our program."

The hardest part for Myers is finding the non-affiliated Jews.

In some cases, he has established links with Jews outside the official community only by chance.

Myers found one family through the funeral of an elderly woman who was already known in Jewish circles.

"Some people try to obliterate their Jewishness. That is impossible," Myers said. "They assimilated, but not entirely."

"There is just enough of a vestige of their Jewish identity, and if we can offer them something besides Jewishness we can attract them."

The father of six has already enjoyed considerable success in this regard. He and his wife established a kindergarten for 3- to 6-year-olds in their own home several years ago.

Myers expects 14 or 15 to attend next year.

The project's success led to the establishment of the educational center just yards from the heart of the Jewish community in Bratislava.

The center, which costs \$60,000 a year to run, offers English lessons and will hold seminars on Jewish themes.

Myers wants to build a library, too.

"We really feel that the potential for growth is among the Jews no one knows about yet," he said.

"We are already enhancing the lives of those who were not identifying with the Jewish people but who are now." □

Complaint filed in soccer incident

NEW YORK (JTA) — The U.N. high commissioner for human rights is welcoming a move by a French soccer club in the city of Strasbourg to take legal action against fans who sprayed anti-Semitic slogans on a stadium after the team's defeat.

Mary Robinson's comments came after the mayor of Strasbourg and a representative of France's umbrella organization for secular Jews filed a complaint against the actions. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Fragile post-Camp David calm shattered by West Bank violence***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The relative calm that followed the collapse of the Camp David talks shattered this week in the West Bank.

A flashpoint, again, was in Hebron, where 400 Jews live in the heart of the Palestinian-controlled town.

In a separate incident, Israeli soldiers killed a 73-year-old Palestinian near Ramallah on Aug. 16 after the man opened fire at an Israel Defense Force unit searching for terror suspects.

Also, a Palestinian boy was killed Sunday in the southern portion of the West Bank when he stepped on unexploded ammunition — apparently a grenade — close to a former Israeli army firing range.

An Israeli human rights group criticized the army for leaving behind live ammunition after holding military exercises.

Tensions in Hebron escalated on Saturday.

Ten people were slightly hurt in a clash between settlers and Palestinians.

Seven Palestinians and three settlers were arrested.

The clashes broke out after a car driven by a Palestinian hit a Jewish boy at an intersection close to Hebron's Jewish Quarter, injuring him slightly.

The Palestinian driver fled.

Although the army said the boy was not hit deliberately, dozens of settlers came down to the accident scene and began fistfights with Palestinians.

The settlers also rampaged through the Arab marketplace, overturning stalls.

Large police and army forces rushed to separate the settlers from the Arabs.

The army later issued a statement blaming the settlers for the incident.

The settlers, on the other hand, claimed that it was their right to react following repeated attempts by Palestinians to hurt Jewish settlers, particularly assaults on Jewish women.

Although emotions in Hebron had calmed by midweek, the tension illustrates how the situation could deteriorate in the territories despite attempts by Jews and Palestinians to keep the situation under control.

Columnist Haim Hanegbi wrote last weekend in the Israeli paper *Ma'ariv* that now is the time to evacuate the Jewish community out of Hebron.

"If there is a bloodbath in Hebron, and death will burst out of the city and spread throughout the country, none of us will be able to blame only the Jewish extremists," wrote Hanegbi.

"It is the government which is responsible for everything that the armed settlers are doing in that hard city. I write Hebron and I think Jerusalem.

"I am fearful that a handful of settlers will be able to drag us all into a new blood adventure."

Columnist — and former right-wing politician — Geula Cohen, agreed.

She reached a totally different conclusion, though, saying the settler's situation should convince Barak not to hand over the

territories to the Palestinians.

"Leaving 50,000 settlers in the area allocated to the Palestinian Authority is the real time bomb. Anyone who does not want to ignore reality can already smell the gunpowder, which can burn down the entire country."

In the meantime, the Palestinian Authority continued to take measures to suppress violence, with the hope that an agreement was still possible.

Israeli policy-makers openly gave the Palestinian Authority credit for having prevented acts of terrorism.

However, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli army's chief of staff, warned last weekend that terrorist attempts would likely continue.

The defense establishment received specific alerts on planned attempts by Muslim radicals to launch terrorist attacks inside the Jewish state proper, with the specific purpose of derailing the peace process.

Mofaz said Hezbollah would try to kidnap soldiers and civilians in the north — and that Hamas and the Islamic Jihad would try to kidnap soldiers as hostages in their demand for the release of security prisoners.

However, despite efforts to prevent violence, tensions in the West Bank are growing.

Seasoned observers are viewing the growing sentiment that there is little chance Israel and the Palestinians will reach an agreement in the foreseeable future as the main reason for Palestinian discontent.

The Palestinian Cabinet insisted over the weekend there would be no compromise with Israel on the key issue of Jerusalem.

It was a statement that was timed to coincide with U.S. envoy Dennis Ross's arrival in the region to revive Middle East peace talks.

The fragility of the situation was illustrated in the incident in which the elderly Palestinian was killed.

Israeli soldiers arrived in a village near Ramallah early last Wednesday to detain terror suspects. Mahmoud Abdullah, 72, slept on the roof, as many Palestinians do during the summer.

Abdullah woke up to the noises of the soldiers.

Suspecting a theft attempt, he fired his gun. The soldiers fired back, killing him.

Abdullah, who had lived in the U.S. Virgin Islands for 20 years, was an uncle of Hassam Abdel Rahman, the Palestinian Liberation Organization's representative in the United States, relatives said.

He was also the father of Hisham Abdullah, a veteran journalist with the Agence France-Presse news agency.

Although the army later acknowledged that it was a tragic misunderstanding, it insisted that the soldiers had acted "according to standard regulations," because they suspected that terrorists were attacking them.

Some analysts say the incident demonstrates that Israel should not only ask Palestinians to take care of their own security, but leave them alone to do so.

"What have we signed the agreements with the Palestinians for if not for the IDF to stop killing innocent people according the security guidelines of the occupation?" wrote analyst Danny Rubinstein in Ha'aretz. "This should be left to the security agencies of Arafat who prevent terrorist attacks, and are in excellent control of the territories." □