



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Pro-Israel initiative launched

A new initiative has been launched to send one or two members of every synagogue in the United States to Israel in the coming months. Dubbed "Operation Joshua," the campaign is the latest effort to show solidarity with the Jewish state.

It is being organized by the Israel Government Tourist Office, with the assistance of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

In a related development, more than 250 American Jewish organizations signed a full-page ad in last Friday's *New York Times*, saying they are "going to Israel this summer."

The ad aims to show solidarity with Israel, which has suffered a huge drop in tourism as a result of the ongoing violence. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which canceled its youth trips this summer, signed on to the ad because its other summer programs are continuing.

Maccabiah to be held as planned

Next month's Maccabiah Games in Jerusalem will go ahead as scheduled, despite mounting concerns over security. Organizers were expected to postpone the games for the first time since World War II, but reconsidered after the U.S. delegation, the second largest contingent, decided to attend.

Israel, P.A. trade accusations

While the number of violent incidents diminished over the weekend, Israel and the Palestinians accused each other of failing to live up to the cease-fire that the United States mediated last week.

Israel said the Palestinians are not arresting terrorists, while the Palestinians called Israel's easing of restrictive measures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip merely "cosmetic."

In continued violence Sunday, an Israeli soldier was lightly wounded when Palestinians set off a roadside bomb and opened fire on an army jeep in the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, Israeli troops apprehended a Palestinian who set off an explosives-laden donkey cart near the soldiers. The blast caused no Israeli injuries, but killed the donkey.

Within Israel proper, Palestinians opened fire on a group of workers working on a highway construction project. Private security guards assigned to protect the workers returned fire. No injuries were reported.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Orthodox woman bucks advice, finds her role as 'religious mentor'

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in a Jewish enclave in the Bronx, Sharona Margolin Halickman longed to be doing the things her synagogue rabbis did.

But her grandmother told her, "No, you're Orthodox, you can't be a rabbi," Halickman recalls.

Now Halickman, the newly installed "madrichah ruchanit," or religious mentor, at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in Bronx, N.Y., is about as close to being a rabbi as an Orthodox woman can get.

She teaches religious classes, gives Shabbat sermons, coordinates services for funerals, weddings and B'nai Mitzvah, prepares candidates for conversion and offers religious counseling to individuals.

However, she cannot do anything that violates Orthodox interpretation of halachah, or Jewish law.

As a result, Halickman doesn't count as a member of a minyan, or prayer quorum.

Nor she can lead prayer services, sit on a rabbinic court or serve as a religious witness.

Halickman's new role comes as Orthodox women are achieving unprecedented levels of Jewish learning.

Post-high school religious study has become almost de rigeur for North American Orthodox women.

Yeshiva University recently started an advanced Talmud study program for women.

In Israel, a small cadre of women have trained to become halachic consultants on family purity, the laws that govern mikvah use and married couples' sexual relations.

Hebrew Institute's senior rabbi, Avi Weiss, said he hopes to create a more expansive program in the United States, one that will train women to make halachic decisions on family purity and a range of other issues.

But while Halickman and Weiss tout Halickman's new job as a significant step forward, others wonder whether it's just a fancy new name for a small experiment that was launched in New York in 1997 but never took off nationally: the congregational intern program.

In that program, which was compared to internships for rabbinic students, young women took temporary posts with duties similar to Halickman's.

However, only two synagogues — Hebrew Institute and Manhattan's Lincoln Square Synagogue — participated.

When Lincoln Square discontinued the program last year, many observers pronounced it a failure.

Halickman and Weiss insist that her position is different because it is a permanent, full-time role and because she participates fully in planning and behind-the-scenes work that interns did not do.

"With the internship, everyone said, 'What are you interning to become?'" said Halickman, who was one of Hebrew Institute's interns before becoming the synagogue's educational director.

The new job, she said, provides more of a career path.

At her recent installation ceremony, Ronnie Becher, an officer with both the Hebrew Institute and Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, described the "madrichah ruchanit" job as a "giant step on the road of granting recognition and dignity" to the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Discord at Cabinet meeting

An argument erupted between Israeli Cabinet ministers Sunday over Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's refusal to let Foreign Minister Shimon Peres meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Sharon reiterated that Israel will not negotiate while violence continues. According to Peres, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed the meeting to shore up a cease-fire between the two sides.

E.U. backs Mideast truce

European Union leaders gave their backing to the Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire brokered last week by the United States. In a statement issued Saturday at an E.U. summit in Gothenburg, Sweden, the leaders called for an end to more than eight months of violence.

In another development, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan held separate talks over the weekend with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat as part of efforts to cement a cease-fire agreement.

Parties urged to bolt coalition

A group representing Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip urged right-wing parties that are part of the government coalition to bolt the unity government. The Yesha Council cited Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policy of restraint in dealing with Palestinian violence.

BBC defends Sharon show

The BBC defended its plan to air a documentary this week probing whether Prime Minister Ariel Sharon should be tried for war crimes in connection with the Sabra and Shatilla massacre of Palestinian civilians by Christian militiamen during the 1982 Lebanon war.

The show has been sharply criticized by Israeli officials, but the BBC said it is a legitimate analysis of a human rights issue.

"vast untapped potential of women." Halickman's eager smile, slender build and white canvas tennis shoes make her look younger than her 27 years.

Despite her trailblazing status, she is reluctant to describe herself as a feminist.

"I can have my own role. I can be part of the team but don't have to be exactly like the rabbi or men," she said. "Often, I find feminists just want to be like the men."

Halickman knows that the liberal streams of Judaism allow women larger roles in ritual activities — and would have given her the opportunity to become a rabbi — but she said she never was tempted to leave Orthodoxy.

"I'm not interested in mixed prayer services; I would have a problem with that," she said.

"I want to do this because I want to be more committed to the religion," and studying in a Reform or Conservative venue "would be taking me away from the religion I was used to."

The halachic restrictions that limit her job duties do not bother her, she said.

"I feel like there are so many things I can do that the rabbis can't do," she said, noting that she is able to accompany women converts to the mikvah, serve as a role model for Bat Mitzvah students and assist women during prayer services.

"Often we dance in the middle of the service or at the end if it's a happy occasion, and I'll help get the women started," she said.

Halickman strictly follows the obligation to dress modestly. She covers her shoulder-length, strawberry blond hair with large, stylish hats and wears long, loose-fitting dresses.

While few people will publicly criticize the Hebrew Institute, some Orthodox leaders worry that Halickman's new job will lead to the ordination of women.

Weiss said he is familiar with the "slippery slope" concern, but that "we're convinced we're on very solid halachic grounds."

Others question whether women should have public leadership roles.

"Some would say it's not modest that women be as public, but I say, all you have to do is listen to Sharona and she's the epitome of leadership with humility," Weiss said. "She knows how to assert herself and is a strong leader, but a very unassuming person."

In some ways, Halickman's job is not so different from that of rebbetzins, or rabbis' wives, many of whom traditionally have offered classes and counseling for women congregants.

Today, however, more and more rebbetzins have their own careers.

"I'm not married to a rabbi, so does that mean I should never get to do all these things?" she asked.

Her husband, Josh, is an accountant, and is a regular fixture at the shul, along with the couple's toddler son, Dov.

At the installation ceremony, Deborah Cooperman, a member of the shul's learning service, described Halickman as "academically rigorous, intellectually honest and open and so supportive of students."

"With Sharona, there are no unaskable questions and that gives her students untold confidence," Cooperman said.

At a recent class in the synagogue's library, Halickman was poised but informal, encouraging the mostly older women students to participate — and patiently answering their questions.

At the end of the one-hour session, retiree Selma Brick said she had taken several classes with Halickman because the young woman "knows her stuff."

"It's a first," Brick said of Halickman's new role. "It's what she's been doing, but now she's got a title. She's not going to be a lady rabbi, but she's a very learned person." □

Israeli hacker won't do time

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli computer hacker known as "The Analyzer" has been sentenced to six months of community service and a fine of approximately \$18,000.

Ehud Tannenbaum, 21, was convicted of infiltrating computer systems belonging to the U.S. Defense Department and the Israeli army, among others. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Slave labor payments to begin

The Claims Conference plans to make its first payments Tuesday to Holocaust-era forced and slave laborers.

The move comes after German officials announced last Friday that they had transferred funds to groups in the United States, Poland and the Czech Republic that will in turn distribute the payments to the former laborers.

Under the terms of an agreement reached in March 2000, some 240,000 former slave laborers — about 140,000 of whom are Jewish — will receive up to \$7,500 each. More than 1 million forced laborers will get up to \$2,500 each.

In another development, attorneys in five countries who represented the laborers were awarded more than \$52 million in legal fees.

The fees represent between 1 percent and 1.5 percent of the overall settlement, rather than the traditional contingency fee of one-third.

Scientists atone for Nazi crimes

A German scientific society apologized to the victims of medical experiments carried out during the Nazi era.

As part of its efforts to come to terms with the past, the Max Planck Society invited former victims to attend a reconciliation ceremony later this month in Germany.

Anti-Semitism hits Russian city

Two separate anti-Semitic incidents occurred last week in a northwestern Russian city, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

In the first incident in Velikie Luki, 43 graves were damaged in the Jewish cemetery. In the second, windows were shattered in the recently renovated building of the local Chesed, an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee-funded program that serves elderly Jews.

The incidents followed reports that several of the city's 1,000 Jews found anti-Semitic letters in their mailboxes. The ADL has written letters to local government and religious officials, asking them to condemn and fully investigate the incidents.

Labor group pledges activism

The Jewish Labor Committee pledged to pursue an "activist agenda" on expanding support for public education, pushing hate crimes legislation, protecting Medicare and Social Security and battling White House efforts to allocate public funds to religious institutions.

Over 200 Jewish labor leaders, joined by Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Israeli Consul General Alon Pinkas, attended the group's recent convention in New York.

U.S. investigates use of weapons, but Israel says it's not concerned

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. General Accounting Office will examine the use of military aid by Middle Eastern countries after a lawmaker expressed concern over Israel's recent use of American-made F-16 warplanes to attack Palestinian targets.

However, GAO officials say the report will not draw conclusions about Israel's actions in clashes with the Palestinians and will not evaluate which weapons can be used for what purpose.

"We will not be evaluating any specific incidents," Tom Denomme, assistant director of GAO's Acquisition and Sourcing Management Group — which will be issuing the report — told JTA.

"We're looking at information, not evaluation."

The GAO is the investigative arm of Congress, and any conclusions reached in the report might contrast with the comments of Bush administration officials, who have refused to directly tackle the issue.

Denomme said the report, expected by the end of July, will "identify the body of military aid going to Middle East countries and identifying any restrictions placed on the use of those weapons."

The investigation will look specifically at Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinian Authority, Denomme said.

He added that the list could be expanded to include other Middle Eastern countries that receive American military aid.

In a recent letter to President Bush, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), the ranking minority member of the House Judiciary Committee, said he was concerned that Israel may be violating the Arms Export Control Act.

According to the law, U.S.-made weaponry sold to foreign countries can only be used for defensive purposes.

"It appears on the face of numerous international reports that attacks on Palestinian Authority headquarters and regional police stations fall outside these terms," said Conyers, who represents Detroit, which has the largest Arab population of any American city.

Conyers also urged Bush to launch an executive branch investigation.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said earlier this month that the Jewish state's use of F-16s creates a "difficult situation," and that he hopes the weapons are not used in the future.

Israel used the planes to attack a Palestinian Authority security installation in May in retaliation for a suicide bombing in the coastal city of Netanya.

The State Department has resisted calls from the Arab-American community to launch a formal investigation, saying instead that it is "monitoring" the situation.

An Israeli official in Washington said Israel is not concerned by the GAO investigation.

The Israeli government is "confident that Israel's use of American weapons in counterterrorism activity is in accordance with both the spirit and the letter of the relevant agreements with the United States," said Mark Regev, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

"Clearly, counterterrorism is by its very nature defensive."

Since the investigation was announced, American Jewish leaders have sought to downplay the significance of GAO reports. However, they took the office's work very seriously when the GAO investigated the Palestine Liberation Organization's finances in 1995.

But the influence of the latest report will depend largely on the scope of the analysis and whether it specifically reviews Israel's use of F-16s — which GAO officials say it will not do.

Even if it does, one Israeli official said he was not overly worried, citing the lack of concern by other governmental bodies.

"With the fact that the Pentagon and the State Department have dealt with these issues with the necessary sensitivity and understanding, I don't think the GAO is going to take the lead on this," the official said. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

New Bahai gardens in Haifa offer an oasis of peace amid the intifada

By Gil Sedan

HAIFA (JTA) — For just a while recently, Israelis enjoyed a forgotten pleasure — some favorable international attention.

Some 4,500 visitors from nearly 200 countries converged on Haifa late last month to attend the opening ceremonies of the Bahai Carmel Gardens located at the world headquarters of the Bahai faith. An estimated \$250 million — contributed by 5 million Bahai worshippers worldwide — was invested to transform the slopes of the Bahai center on Mount Carmel into 19 colorful, terraced gardens cascading down the length of the mountain.

“There is no other city in Israel that received such a gift, and we intend to cherish it all the way,” Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna said as he stood on Mount Carmel, overlooking Haifa Bay.

The Haifa Tourism Board expected a flood of tourists to fill the local hotels. Given the downturn in foreign tourism since the outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian violence last fall, however, most of the tourists will be Israeli.

Gone are the days when Mediterranean-style love boats anchored at Haifa’s port as their passengers toured the Holy Land. But Mitzna, who refers to the gardens as the eighth wonder of the world, hopes the Bahai gardens may help Haifa stake out a place on the world tourism map.

“Once the gates open, there will not be a tourist who will not come here to Haifa,” he said.

A historic coincidence made Haifa the world center of the Bahai faith. Bahai, the most recent of the world’s monotheistic religions, was founded in Iran in 1844. Sayyed Ali Mohammad, the martyr who heralded the arrival of the Bahai faith, challenged the fundamentals of Islam.

Iranian clergymen in the mid-19th century regarded his message of total equality, a single human race and peace on earth as heresy. They persecuted Mohammad — known as the Bab — who eventually was executed and was buried in Haifa.

A new prophet soon arrived — Baha’u’llah, who spent the latter years of his life in the Holy Land as a prisoner of the Ottoman Turks, and was buried in Acre.

The gold-domed Shrine of the Bab, which contains Mohammad’s tomb, became the center of the new world religion — and also is the centerpiece of the Bahai gardens. The most impressive part of the gardens was developed in the past 10 years — flowerbeds, fountains and rows of trees and shrubs that provide an oasis of tranquility in the heart of a country in dire need of some peace and quiet.

“These are not just beautiful gardens,” said Fariburz Sahba, architect of the project. “Beautiful gardens you can find everywhere, but these are spiritual gardens.”

Indeed, the idea behind the project is to allow visitors to take time out of a bustling life, walk through the gardens and have a spiritual experience. The Bahai insist that one need not become a member of the faith to enjoy the gardens’ spirituality. In fact, one of the conditions for their ability to practice their faith freely in Israel is a commitment not to engage in any proselytizing.

There are Bahai communities in 190 countries, but no organized community in Israel. If any Israeli Jews or Arabs have joined the religion, leaders of the world center are careful to keep their identities secret to avoid potential problems with the local religious

establishments. However, some Israelis have raised eyebrows over the fact that the heart of Mount Carmel has been turned over to a “foreign” religion. Mitzna rejects those complaints.

“First of all, the Bahais purchased this land at the turn of the previous century,” Mitzna said. “Secondly,” he asked, “would you rather have the site of ugly shikunim instead?” using the Hebrew term for the cheap public housing projects that mar the landscape in many parts of Israel.

The Bahai religion regards all monotheistic faiths as equal.

“All believe in one God, so why stress the differences?” said Douglas Samimi-Mor, spokesman for the Bahai World Center. “It is only a matter of what religion is relevant at what stage of history. It is like the differences between a third-grade arithmetic teacher and a mathematics professor at the university. They all teach the same, but on different levels.”

Holla Tevakoli, a volunteer from Australia, said the opening of the gardens means “a new phase of development for our faith.”

Like other members of the faith, she believes that if people can learn to love one another, peace on earth will become a reality, not a slogan. Even in this country, torn by interethnic warfare? “Even here, it may take hundreds of years until we attain it,” she said, “but it will come, no doubt about it.” □

Survey says: Austrians believe Jews are exploiting Holocaust

By Daniel Fleishman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Nearly 50 percent of Austrians oppose their government’s decision to compensate Holocaust victims, according to a new poll.

But there are also indications in the poll, commissioned by the American Jewish Committee, that an increasing number of Austrians are acknowledging their country’s role in the Holocaust.

The survey describes “a very complex picture. There’s encouraging news and discouraging news, and it would be short-sighted to focus on one over the other,” said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

In the survey of 2,000 Austrians older than 14 years old, 45 percent disapprove of their government’s decision in January to establish a \$310 million compensation fund for Austrian victims of the Holocaust. Thirty-eight percent approve of the move.

In addition, the same percentage of respondents believe that Jews are exploiting Nazi horrors for their own gain. Again, 38 percent disagreed with this statement.

An official at the Austrian Consulate in New York declined comment, saying he had not read the poll’s results.

Forty-five percent concede that Austria was “also responsible, as a participant, for the events up to 1945.” That figure — in a nation that once welcomed Adolf Hitler — increased since a 1995 poll, when 29 percent of respondents held that opinion. The AJCommittee conducted its first poll of Austrian attitudes in 1991.

The survey also found that 51 percent believe Jorg Haider, leader of the far-right Freedom Party, should be commended for his outspokenness. At the same time, 49 percent of respondents recognize Haider as anti-Semitic and racist. Years ago, Haider praised Hitler’s employment policies and members of the Nazi SS, though he has apologized repeatedly for the remarks.

The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent. The results can be viewed on the Web at www.ajc.org. □

(JTA Staff Writer Peter Ephross contributed to this report.)