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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Report: Peres presents new plan

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres presented a plan to U.S. Middle East envoy David Satterfield and the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, calling for a staggered cease-fire in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to Ha'aretz.

The plan would divide the West Bank and Gaza into areas, and the Palestinians and Israel would restore calm separately in each area until a total cease-fire is reached.

The Palestinian Authority will be required to take measures to restore security in each area, while Israel will withdraw its troops and ease closures on Palestinian populations.

Israel kills two Palestinians

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians in separate clashes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

One was killed after troops fired on Palestinians trying to avoid a checkpoint near the city of Nablus in the West Bank, while the second died when Israeli troops returned fire on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Israel Defense Force.

Israeli helicopters attacked Palestinian targets in the Gaza Strip in retaliation for the Palestinian mortar shelling of a Jewish settlement earlier Sunday.

Up to four Palestinian Authority security personnel were reportedly wounded in the Israeli strike, while one Israeli was wounded in the Palestinian attack on Neveh Dekalim.

Faith-based leader quits

The head of President Bush's effort to open government programs to religious groups is resigning after seven controversial months. [Page 4]

Orthodox rabbi dies at 88

Thousands of mourners turned out last Friday for the funeral of Rabbi Avrohom Pam.

One of the most respected leaders of fervently Orthodox Jews in America, Pam died early last Friday morning at 88. [Page 4]

Invite to Austrian leader revoked

An Orthodox education center in Britain withdrew its invitation to a leading Jewish member of Austria's xenophobic Freedom Party. [Page 3]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Facing teacher crisis, Jewish groups hope to draw young Jews to teaching

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two projects are under way to create Jewish versions of Teach for America, a 10-year-old program that recruits college graduates to teach in public schools.

The efforts come as more and more Jewish leaders are describing the shortage of Jewish teachers and other Jewish communal professionals as a crisis.

The larger project, spearheaded by the Los Angeles-based University of Judaism, aims to recruit recent college graduates and enthusiastic alumni of Israel programs like Birthright Israel — which sends young Jews on free trips to Israel — to work in various spheres of Jewish education.

The other, run by the five-year-old New York-based Edah, will recruit college graduates with modern Orthodox upbringings to teach for two years in modern Orthodox day schools.

Both projects plan to launch next summer.

And both will sponsor summer-long "boot camp"-style training for the new recruits.

But while the University of Judaism hopes to recruit people for long-term careers in Jewish education, Edah expects people simply to invest a few years of service before going on to other careers.

In a similar but smaller program, Brandeis University's Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's education school are training and mentoring 20 people to teach for three years in Boston- and L.A.-area day schools.

The Brandeis-HUC effort also will work closely with the day schools to ensure they are committed to mentoring and ongoing professional development.

The new projects are all in early stages, with many details — such as financial incentives, recruitment tactics, size and the exact content of the training programs — yet to be determined. All plan to start with relatively small pilot groups, and it is not yet clear how much they will cost.

The University of Judaism effort will target "college students who graduate and are not sure yet what they want to do, and even if they are sure, who want to take a break from school and do something out in the field," said Ron Wolfson, vice president of the university.

Teach for America, modeled on the Peace Corps, has not been a blanket success. Some have charged that, particularly in its early years, it did not provide adequate training or ongoing support for its recruits, who go on to teach in some of the nation's most troubled public schools.

Nonetheless, Teach for America has had more than 6,000 participants since its founding in 1990. Some 85 percent to 90 percent of recent recruits have completed their two-year commitments, the organization reports, and 58 percent of all participants remain in the field of education.

However, some worry that Teach for America's success might be harder to replicate in Jewish schools because so few potential teachers have strong foundations in Jewish knowledge. In particular, alumni of Birthright Israel — whom the University of Judaism intends to recruit because they come back enthusiastic about Israel and Judaism — generally have limited Jewish educations.

Susan Shevitz, director of the Hornstein Program, said she supports the various

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel presses on U.N. forum

Israeli President Moshe Katsav sent a letter to 64 heads of state urging them to prevent the upcoming U.N. conference on racism from turning into a tool for condemnation of Israel.

Katsav's letter comes after proposals to denigrate Zionism as racism and condemn Israel's treatment of the Palestinians have provoked considerable discussion in pre-forum meetings.

Israel: We foiled suicide bomb

Israeli officials say they foiled an attempt by Islamic Jihad to carry out a suicide bombing at a Haifa disco. According to details released for publication, two Palestinians from Jenin were arrested in an Israeli Arab village on the night of Aug. 16 with a 22-pound bomb in their truck.

Center Party joins government

Israel's Center Party voted to join the governing coalition of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

As a result, two Center Party members will join Israel's Cabinet: Dan Meridor will become minister without portfolio and Roni Milo will become minister for regional cooperation.

High court backs Nigerian singer

The Israeli Supreme Court rejected an Interior Ministry decision to bar a Nigerian singer from performing in Israel. The justices called the decision unreasonable and said it violated basic rights.

Police deliver Palestinian baby

Israeli border police delivered a Palestinian baby over the weekend, according to Israeli media reports.

The delivery came after policemen heard cries coming from a vehicle at a West Bank checkpoint. Mother and baby, currently at a hospital in the Israeli city of Afula, reportedly are doing well.



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projects, but wonders, "How do you work with people who have had minimal Jewish encounters and not that much depth in Jewish knowledge, to get them to teach on a sophisticated level?"

Another challenge, Shevitz said, is that most Jewish schools lack a "culture of professional development" and do not provide adequate mentoring or training for new teachers.

Yossi Prager, executive director of the New York-based Avi Chai Foundation, a major funder of projects that strengthen Jewish day schools, echoed some of Shevitz's concerns.

"Birthright people are at the very start of their own journeys to Jewish literacy, so what can you possibly give them in a short training period that will qualify them to teach in a day school?" Prager added.

Wolfson acknowledged the challenges of his program. He said recruits with weaker Jewish backgrounds would not teach in day schools — at least not at first — but would likely teach in informal education or congregational schools, where material is covered in less detail.

Wolfson also acknowledged that the program "has to be linked to very good training" and that the new teachers will need to get an "excellent background in Judaica and an excellent background in pedagogic techniques and strategies."

Eliot Spack, executive director of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, welcomed the idea, saying that while there is no "panacea," his group is "all for any idea that recruits people to this field."

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism — which is, among other things, the umbrella for approximately 70 Conservative day schools — said the University of Judaism project "sounds like a great idea."

He is concerned about issues like quality control and the program's ability to "get the right kinds of people," Epstein admitted, but said such concerns are "outweighed by the potential of such a program."

"You've got to risk in order to succeed," he said.

Reaction among students — the programs' target audience — was mixed.

Steve Glickman, 21, of Los Angeles, said the University of Judaism program might appeal to Jews already considering careers in Jewish education, but that most young Jews "not only want to serve the Jewish community, but want to serve the larger community as a whole."

Glickman, who is a student at Georgetown University and spent a semester at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem last year, said part of the appeal of Teach for America — that the Jewish programs would not have — is that "you are able to work with kids in economically disadvantaged communities, which serves as an added learning experience."

However, Jennifer Schoen, a recent graduate of Binghamton University in New York, said she had been considering teaching in general and that a Jewish Teach for America sounds very appealing.

"Although I admittedly have never thought about Jewish education, I believe I would enjoy Judaism as a curriculum," said Schoen, who was active in the Conservative movement's United Synagogue Youth as a teen-ager.

Young people's reactions to the Edah effort were similarly mixed.

Shira Alpert, 22, a graduate student in education at the University of Pennsylvania, said she likes the idea, but the program will "have a tough time finding students who are willing to give up two years."

Most modern Orthodox students she knows from her undergraduate years at Penn are more "career-minded" than other students, Alpert said.

Modern Orthodox young people "start families earlier, marry earlier and most of my friends are going straight to graduate school or into investment banking jobs," she said.

But Amara Levine, a senior at Penn, was enthusiastic about the idea, noting that Orthodox day schools in small communities like her hometown of Memphis, have particular difficulty finding qualified teachers.

Plus, with the bad economy, she said, "Now would be a good time to start it up because students are not sure about finding jobs right away." □

JEWISH WORLD

Russian shul arson suspected

The leader of the local Jewish community says he suspects arson in a fire that damaged a synagogue in a Russian town south of Moscow.

Leonid Reznikov told Reuters that the fire in Ryazan's only synagogue had started early Aug. 16 and gutted most of the ground floor.

He said nobody was hurt in the blaze.

Group: NPR coverage 'skewed'

U.S. public radio's coverage of Israel is skewed and false, according to a Middle East media watchdog group that took out an ad in Sunday's New York Times. Between late September and late November, National Public Radio ran more stories that only featured Arabs, and its stories on the conflict contained more pro-Palestinian/pro-Arab words than pro-Israel words, according to CAMERA.

Wiesel to help lead Israel rally

The United Jewish Communities named Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel to be the honorary chair of a pro-Israel solidarity rally slated to be held in New York next month.

Bagel king Marvin Lender will chair the Sept. 23 rally, sponsored by North American Jewish groups from across the religious and political spectrums.

Death of Hitler deputy marked

Some 800 demonstrators marched in Germany to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the death of Hitler deputy Rudolf Hess. Saturday's demonstration in the Bavarian town where Hess is buried took place after a court overturned a local ruling banning the march.

Ukrainian teachers finish forum

More than 70 Jewish educators completed a weeklong seminar Sunday for Jewish teachers in Ukraine sponsored by the Israeli branch of the Conservative movement.

The seminar featured lectures by Israeli professors on religion, Jewish culture and Hebrew.

Coach's personal nets e-dates

A U.S. basketball coach who advertised over Israeli television that he was looking for a wife at last month's Maccabiah Games said he is maintaining e-mail contact with about four or five of the women he met in Israel.

Todd Schoyes, 36, told The New York Times that he received more than 5,000 phone calls after his search for a woman received widespread media attention. "It's been flattering for me, all this attention," he said.

British Jewish group backs down, rescinds invite to Austrian rightist

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — An Orthodox education center in Britain has withdrawn its invitation to a leading Jewish member of Austria's xenophobic Freedom Party.

The invitation to Peter Sichrovsky was canceled after sponsors of the Yakar center threatened to withdraw support for the institution, according to Rabbi Jeremy Rosen, Yakar's director.

But Rosen defended the invitation.

"There is a difference between giving someone a platform and engaging them in debate. We were essentially going to grill Sichrovsky," Rosen said. "I have no problem in sitting down with a Muslim extremist or Louis Farrakhan if it comes to that, and saying, How can you say this or do this? How can you justify this?"

Yakar had invited Sichrovsky to speak on Sept. 9.

The invitation reportedly was extended after Yakar had invited the controversial Jorg Haider, the Freedom Party's de facto leader, who was not available.

The Freedom Party is known for its nationalist, anti-immigrant rhetoric, and Haider has praised Hitler's employment policies and members of the Nazi SS, though he has apologized repeatedly for the remarks. Sichrovsky represents the party in the European Parliament and is the party's general secretary for international relations.

The chief rabbi of Austria and the head of the Austrian Jewish community reportedly condemned the invitation.

Ariel Muzicant, the leader of Austrian Jewry, has had a long-running battle with the Freedom Party, both in and out of court.

He told the London Jewish Chronicle that Sichrovsky would portray the invitation as a seal of approval from British Jewry.

Rosen, a member one of Britain's most distinguished rabbinic families, said Yakar — which prides itself on its "challenging approach at the cutting edge of social and political issues" — was a natural venue for that kind of debate.

"I can understand if an establishment organization is worried, but the whole point of independent think tanks is to be able to do these kinds of things," he said.

Lord Janner, a vice president of the World Jewish Congress and a Yakar supporter, said the invitation to Sichrovsky was not appropriate.

"It is unacceptable to provide a platform" to a Freedom Party member, Janner said. "It gives them a degree of respectability, and it outraged the Jewish community of Austria. There is a limit to what you can do as far as free speech is concerned."

"Where do you draw the line? I draw it at racists and anti-Semites, and if Sichrovsky is not one personally, he is associated with a party that has made racist and anti-Semitic statements," Janner said.

Rosen said Sichrovsky had not put himself beyond the pale.

He rejected a comparison between Sichrovsky and Holocaust denier David Irving, for example, whom a British court labeled a "racist anti-Semite who had deliberately misrepresented and distorted historical evidence about the Holocaust."

"I'm not aware that Sichrovsky has been through a court of law" that showed he had done anything dishonest, Rosen said.

Sichrovsky did not respond to a request for comment on the incident.

Rosen said the debate goes to the heart of one of world Jewry's shortcomings.

The refusal to allow debate "is typical of people who can't argue their case," he said. "It is symptomatic of Jewish communities in general and Anglo Jewry in particular." □

Israel, Britain deny arms use

LONDON (JTA) — Israel and the British Foreign Office are rejecting BBC allegations that Israel has used British-made weapons against Palestinians.

"No U.K.-originated equipment, systems, sub-systems or components are used as part of Israel Defense Force activities in the territories," Israel's Ministry of Defense said. □

To dismay of Jewish groups, DiIulio resigns faith-based post

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Even though they are disappointed by President Bush's plan to increase religious organizations' role in providing social services, many Jewish groups regret that the man pegged to implement the plan has announced his resignation.

John DiIulio Jr., director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, resigned last Friday, just a day after the White House released a report on the barriers faced by religious groups when they try to get federal funding for social service programs.

In office for just seven months, DiIulio will leave as soon as a transition team can be put into place, the White House said.

In an interview with Cox Newspapers, DiIulio said he is leaving because he has accomplished the goals he set out seven months ago, when Bush asked him to run the new office.

But the former University of Pennsylvania professor had been consistently under fire as he explained the administration's plan to open government social service programs to religious groups.

DiIulio made no secret of his distaste for Washington bureaucracy.

"I hate the nonsense that goes on here," he said.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said he was saddened by DiIulio's departure.

"While we continue to have fundamental disagreements with the administration's approach to charitable choice funding, we have found Professor DiIulio to always be inclusive, considerate and respectful of others' views," he said.

"He was nothing but a class act," added Reva Price, Washington representative for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, praised DiIulio's grasp of the issue.

"The smartest thing President Bush did in support of his 'faith-based initiative' was bringing in John DiIulio to run it," he said.

DiIulio's resignation marks a crossroads for the president, Saperstein said.

"In filling this position, the president must decide if he wants to forge a consensus around aspects of his plan which can unite Americans — such as helping nonprofit organizations, including religiously affiliated organizations, better serving those in need — or if he wants to push ahead with those aspects of the plan such as direct government funding for churches and synagogues which will divide Americans along religious lines," Saperstein said.

DiIulio's resignation came a day after the White House released a report detailing 15 barriers that faith-based groups face when trying to get federal funding.

The report echoes Orthodox Jewish groups' claim that religious organizations are unfairly treated under current law and should be given better chances to compete for funding.

Orthodox groups are among the few in the Jewish community that support Bush's effort to give religiously-based organizations a larger role in providing social services.

Most Jewish groups are concerned that an expanded partnership between the government and faith-based institutions could infringe on religious liberties and imply toleration of employment discrimination. □

OBITUARY

Rabbi Avrohom Pam dies at 88; yeshiva dean and corruption critic

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Avrohom Pam, one of the most respected voices in the fervently Orthodox Jewish community, died early last Friday morning of cancer.

Pam, who was 88, was one of eight members of Agudath Israel of America's Council of Torah Sages and longtime dean of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn. In 1997, Pam gave the opening lesson for a group of 18,000 at a national celebration marking the completion of the Talmud cycle, an event for religious Jews who read a page of Talmud each day.

In 1990, he helped found the Shuvu network of religious schools in Israel for immigrants from the former Soviet Union. He also was an advocate for education for Jewish immigrants to the United States.

Pam, who was remembered as unassuming, insisted before his death that no eulogy be given at his funeral, so the service last Friday consisted solely of prayers and psalms.

Thousands of mourners turned out for the occasion, even though many local Orthodox Jews spend their summers in the Catskill Mountains.

Born in Russia, Pam came to New York as a child. He studied at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and began teaching there in 1937.

He often said that Russian Jewish immigrants were the "great-grandchildren of our greatest rabbis and leaders, and we have a special responsibility to them to give back what they were denied" under communism, said David Zwiebel, one of Pam's former students and executive vice president for government and public affairs at Agudath Israel of America.

Pam was known for his strong statements against corruption and criminal activity among fervently Orthodox Jews.

Referring to a scandal in which four Chasidic Jews in suburban New York obtained presidential pardons, allegedly in exchange for their community's support for Hillary Clinton's Senate campaign, Pam this spring called for "making immediate and intense efforts to make Orthodoxy synonymous once again with honesty and integrity."

At Agudath Israel's last convention, in November 2000, Pam gave a speech expressing his concern about recent cases of fervently Orthodox Jews misusing or stealing government funds.

Speaking in both Yiddish and English, Pam noted "the ultimate irony of people who dedicate their lives to learning Torah and then use unethical means to support themselves," Zwiebel recalled.

Pam lived in a small house in Brooklyn and, though he had been ill for several years, continued to walk the two blocks from his home to the yeshiva, using one of his wife's shopping carts as a walker.

Abraham Biederman, an activist in Brooklyn's Orthodox community and another former student, said Pam had "thousands and thousands of students and tens of thousands of people who were his admirers and adherents."

"Whatever he said went, not by force but by warmth of personality," Biederman said.

Pam was buried in a cemetery in Queens, N.Y. He is survived by his wife, Sarah, three sons and several grandchildren. □