

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli: Onus on Abbas

Israel's foreign minister said the first months of the term of Palestinian Authority's new prime minister will be critical to show if he is willing and able to crack down on terrorism.

If Mahmoud Abbas doesn't take serious steps against Palestinian terrorist organizations during the first month or two of his term, he's unlikely to do so later, Silvan Shalom said Monday. The first months will be a testing period for Abbas not just in the eyes of Israel, the United States and the European Union, but also in the eyes of terrorist organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Shalom said.

Shalom, who met Monday with President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, also told reporters that there is a "great understanding" between Israel and the United States that the Palestinians must end violence against Israel before Israel can make any concessions.

Gas bomb thrown at Paris shul

A gasoline bomb was thrown at a synagogue near Paris. The outer wall of the synagogue in Massy, some 20 miles south of the capital, was partially burned in the attack. The synagogue itself was empty at the time of the incident.

Meanwhile, a 63-year-old woman was treated for facial injuries March 27 after stones and pieces of cement blocs were thrown into the grounds of a synagogue in Garges-les-Gonesse, a large Jewish community in Paris' northern suburbs.

Muslim textbooks anti-Semitic

Textbooks used in Islamic schools in New York teach anti-Semitism, according to a newspaper investigation. According to the New York Daily News, the books teach that Jews betrayed the Islamic prophet Mohammed and believe in racial superiority.

The books, which also denigrate Christianity, are published by companies that distribute textbooks to Islamic schools in the United States. The founder and director of one of these companies, Abidullah al-Ansari Ghazi, told the Daily News that some passages need to be changed.

But the other publisher, Yahiya Emerick, stands by the books. "Islam, like any belief system, believes its program is better than others," he said.

WAR IN IRAQ

Seder comes second to angst for military families trying to cope

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Mordechai Finley of Congregation Ohr HaTorah in Los Angeles has devised a strategy to help his two young daughters cope with having their big brother Kayitz fighting in Iraq.

Kayitz, 21, is a corporal with a front-line combat unit, the 1st Battalion of the 4th U.S. Marines Division, which has already waged bloody battles against Iraqi units in Nasiriya south of Baghdad.

Besides limiting the TV viewing of his girls, ages 5 and 9, he says, "I tell them, 'I'll let you know when it's time to worry.'"

"When there's been a big battle, I tell them the next day, 'It was time to worry, but I forgot to tell you, so now you don't have to worry.'"

And so each day goes for the Finleys and thousands of American families like them, who desperately hope to learn something about the fate of their loved ones, and try somehow to deal with knowing very little.

Kayitz is one of some 1,000 Jewish men and woman serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

These individuals represent a fraction of the estimated 20,000 Jews among the 1.5-million-person U.S. armed forces.

In many ways, the angst of Jewish families is indistinguishable from that of all families with loved ones serving in the armed services.

Jewish families are finding that the war is hitting home spiritually as well.

And then, of course, there's the approaching holiday of Passover, which begins April 16.

The Finleys usually host 30 to 40 people at their home for Passover, but this year, the rabbi says, "I haven't decided what we'll do yet."

One thing he knows. With Kayitz in Iraq, he says, "his being there and fighting for freedom is really a family theme" for the seder.

For her part, Judy Ledger of Atlanta is also sure about one thing.

"We're not doing seder — I just can't see doing it without them," she says, referring to her son and daughter and their fiances, all of whom serve in the military.

Ledger spends much of her time worrying. "It takes up a lot of my time," she says.

Her son, Matthew Boyer, 24, is a field artillery specialist with the 101st Airborne, 3rd Brigade, and is now in Iraq. His fiancée is a chemical and biological trainer with another unit of the 101st Airborne in Kuwait.

Ledger's daughter, Ilana Boyer, 21, a army medic, remains stationed at Fort Sill, Okla., but Ilana's fiance is with the 82nd Airborne in Kuwait.

Not only does she worry about her son's safety, but the images of allied POWs in Iraqi hands has not escaped her Jewish radar.

When Matthew was inducted, he originally did not list any religion on his dog tag, but before going to Iraq, he changed the listing to Jewish.

"I yelled at him — it's bad enough you're in a dangerous position, but I felt that was even worse," she recalls. "But he said that if he dies, he does not want a priest standing over him."

Trying to glean information about their loved ones is excruciating for these families.

Ledger was buoyed late last week by a "cute" postcard she received from her son, just a few lines scrawled on a torn piece of cardboard.

In a way, Finley is lucky: He discovered that a reporter with the Richmond

MIDEAST FOCUS

Powell, Rice speak to AIPAC

President Bush's plan for Middle East peace "requires an end to the use of violence and terror as a political tool," Secretary of State Colin Powell told the major U.S. pro-Israel lobby. Speaking Sunday at the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Powell also reiterated the president's call for an end to settlement activity, a remark that drew both applause and a few scattered boos.

Meanwhile, Condoleezza Rice said the "road map" toward Middle East peace is nonnegotiable, according to Jewish officials who attended the off-the-record speech.

Bush's national security adviser said, however, that Israel will be able to make comments on the map.

AIPAC also heard Sunday from Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who said he sees an opportunity in the appointment of a Palestinian prime minister to "see if we can narrow the gaps" between Israel and the Palestinians.

Palestinians honor Iraqi bomber

Palestinians in a West Bank refugee camp named their main square after the Iraqi who carried out a suicide attack against American soldiers, according to a news report.

The name of the plaza in Jenin was renamed Na'mani Square during a rally Sunday, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Acquittal in Rabin case

An Israeli undercover agent was acquitted of charges that he failed to prevent the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Avishai Raviv was acquitted Monday. Raviv, a right-wing activist, was working for Israel's Shin Bet when Yigal Amir gunned down Rabin in November 1995. Amir is serving a life sentence for assassinating Rabin.

Times-Dispatch is embedded with the 1st Battalion, and so he studies the paper's Web dispatches daily to glean clues about Kayitz.

After every battle, Finley, himself an ex-Marine, braces for the possibility that within a few hours, army officials could arrive at his home with bad news.

"When there are battles in Nasiriya, I feel horrible. The two hours after a news flash are the most horrible," he says.

Allan Rubin of Dallas has even less insight into his son's condition. Every day, Rubin and his wife, Linda, send their son Daniel, 21, a postcard that includes the phrase, "another day, no word."

That's because they have not heard from Daniel since January, when he shipped out from Camp Pendleton, Calif., with the Light Armored Vehicle 1st Battalion of the 1st Marine Division, to Kuwait and points beyond.

"It's a little hard," Rubin says, his voice breaking. "He's just a wonderful young man."

Daniel, a mechanic and technician, is very likely near Basra in southern Iraq, from what Rubin has gleaned from news reports and an ABC News reporter who is embedded with what he thinks is his son's unit.

While he's worried, Rubin says, "I know he's trained well and I know he's doing all the right things, so in that respect, my heart is settled with him."

The Rubins also feel buoyed by the support of friends and family. Their synagogue, Tiferet Israel in Dallas, says a misheberach, or prayer for good health, for Daniel every Shabbat.

All of these families have turned to The Brave, a listserv — kind of an e-mail bulletin board — that the Conservative movement's United Synagogue is sponsoring to help Jewish military families connect. Jewish military officials and their families sometimes have different perspectives on the war.

One member of The Brave listserv who has not yet been deployed is Philip, 40, a member of the army reserve in Massachusetts.

Philip fully supports the war's aims and sees no small irony in that U.S. troops are battling Iraqi soldiers in a brigade with the name Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of ancient Babylonia, part of modern-day Iraq.

For Philip, it's all about Sept. 11.

"People had a choice of jumping out of that building or being incinerated," he says. "Did we forget what we're fighting for?"

Meanwhile, he still dreads leaving his wife and children behind.

"I don't mind going — I mind leaving," he says.

Unlike many whose kin are in the military, Becky O'Brien, of Lafayette, Colo., opposes the war.

Her husband, Chris, 37, who is not Jewish, is with the Air National Guard somewhere in the war theater.

To find solace, O'Brien attended a recent peace service at her synagogue, Congregation Har HaShem.

"Judaism teaches you to question God, your rabbi, it's the rabbinic tradition. You can have one text and 30 interpretations," she says. "You should be able to question the president." □

Israeli suicide rate skyrockets

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The number of Israelis who committed suicide rose by 65 percent in the past year.

According to Labor and Social Affairs Minister Zevulun Orlev, who announced the statistic at the Knesset on March 27, 100 more people committed suicide in 2002 than in 2001.

"The question we have to answer is if there is a connection between the suicides and the dire economic situation, especially among the lower middle class," Orlev said, according to the Jerusalem Post. "The bad security situation has been around for over two years, and if people were committing suicide because of the security situation, we would have seen a dramatic rise in suicides over two years ago," a Health Ministry official said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

South African: War is unlawful

The war in Iraq is unlawful, a leading South African Jew and international human rights expert said. Judge Richard Goldstone said the United States is endangering the body of international humanitarian law built up since World War II.

"If the only superpower regards itself as above the law, then it has the potential of releasing everybody from the law," said Goldstone, one of three Jewish judges serving on South Africa's highest court.

Goldstone is the former chief prosecutor for international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as the president of the World ORT Union. His comments were published in two newspapers on Sunday.

Lieberman: More gay rights

Presidential candidate Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) said gay rights should be extended.

Speaking to hundreds of Reform Jewish leaders on Capitol Hill on Monday, the senator said he would push legislation to give gay and lesbian partners of federal employees the same benefits provided to heterosexual spouses.

Lieberman told the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's biannual conference that he would introduce the legislation "and sign it as president of the United States."

Lieberman also said he backs other progressive issues such as abortion rights and affirmative action.

Bauer receives warm welcome

A conservative Christian leader received several standing ovations at a conference of the major U.S. pro-Israel lobby. Gary Bauer was applauded Sunday after he told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that "Israel has a right and obligation to defend herself and no U.N. bureaucrat can take it away."

Bauer, a former Republican presidential candidate, added: "Whoever sits in the confines of Washington, D.C., and says to the people of Israel that they have to give up more in order for peace, that is an obscenity."

Bauer added that Muslim fundamentalism is "evil" and "Christians and Jews will stand against it and we will prevail."

Holocaust education for teachers

A training program in Holocaust education is being developed for teachers in California. Classes in Holocaust education are mandatory in California schools.

The program will consist of campus workshops, online professional development courses and introductions to Web site resources.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

After four decades of struggle, heirs of Czech collector win back some art

By Pavla Kozakova

PRAGUE (JTA)—The Israeli heirs of a Czech Jewish art lover, whose works were looted by the Nazis in 1939, have won a 40-year battle to win back a large portion of his collection of drawings.

Legal representatives for the descendants of Brno-based lawyer Arthur Feldmann recently signed a restitution agreement that will return 135 drawings by Dutch, Italian and German masters from the 16th to the 18th centuries, which currently are held in the Moravian Gallery.

"We are very moved that thanks to the Czech authorities the drawings have now been returned to our ownership after so many years," the family said in a statement released by Anne Webber, co-chair of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, which has negotiated for the past two years for the return of the works on behalf of the family.

The heirs, who said they had pursued the return of the works in memory of their grandfather, have asked to remain anonymous.

"The Feldmann restitution is a measure of the commitment of the Czech government and the Moravian Gallery to right the wrongs of the Nazi era, which are still so vividly felt," Webber said.

Feldmann was a passionate collector who started collecting drawings in the early 1900s, including works attributed to Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt.

In 1934, Feldmann sold a small number of drawings, one of which is now in the Pierpoint Morgan Library in New York.

He began rebuilding his collection immediately after the sale. However, the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and Feldmann's collection, by now numbering some 750 drawings, was confiscated.

In March 1941, Feldmann was arrested and sentenced to death. He later died as a result of torture, according to his family.

In January 1942, his wife was deported to Theresienstadt and later to Auschwitz. She never returned.

Feldmann's two sons survived the war, and their children now live in Israel.

After the war, Feldmann's descendants launched a search for the remnants of the collection, and in the 1960s discovered a number of his works in the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

The family tried and failed to retrieve them during the Communist era. Their hopes of successfully claiming the works faded again in 1995, when the Czech courts rejected their restitution claim on the grounds that the works were seized before the legally set time limit of 1948.

The family's hopes revived in 2000 when a new law was passed allowing some pre-1948 claims. They asked the nonprofit, London-based Commission for Looted Art in Europe to take up their case, and the commission renewed negotiations with the state and the Moravian Gallery.

In late 2002, they were informed that their claim had been accepted.

Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, welcomed the successful outcome of the family's long battle, calling it a case of "moral satisfaction."

Pointing out that this was only the third successful restitution of art works in the Czech Republic since the law was changed in 2000, Kraus said he appreciates that the law worked.

The significance of Feldmann's collection has been recognized by the Moravian Gallery, which has offered, with the consent of the Ministry of Culture, to purchase the five most important works for about \$160,000. Webber said the family was considering the offer and would "respond in due course."

The commission has a further five cases of art restitution pending in the Czech Republic, according to Webber, whose organization last year successfully submitted a claim to the British Museum in London relating to four Old Master drawings also once owned by Feldmann and looted in Brno in 1939. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

As Shoah museum marks 10 years, organizers' initial fears are gone

By Eli Kintisch

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A decade ago, on the eve of the opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, organizers had no idea how the museum would be received by the general public.

Focus groups had been ambivalent. Experts recommended downsizing the building to accommodate smaller crowds.

Organizers feared that Jews would make up the bulk of the guests the first year, and that attendance would then dwindle.

"It was a heart-stopping mystery," recalls Mark Talisman, a one-time stagehand who served as the founding vice chairman of the organization behind the museum. "It reminded me in a hugely more important way of opening night."

Now in its 10th year, it's safe to say that worries about the museum have long since been forgotten. The building was sold out in its first year, forcing staff to scramble to create a timed entrance system for the 2.1 million visitors who would come through the doors that year.

Since then, with an average of 2 million visitors per year, the museum has become one of the top stops for tourists, schoolchildren and dignitaries visiting the nation's capital — to the point where it has to turn groups away to avoid overcrowding.

Furthermore, surveys report that Jews make up only 28 percent of the guests.

Ceremonies planned for later this month and June marking the museum's first 10 years are expected to draw dignitaries and visitors from around the world, as should a planned tribute for Holocaust survivors slated for November.

"It goes beyond the Jewish legacy. It's a legacy for all," the chairman of the museum council, Fred Zeidman, said. "I went in yesterday. I was as overwhelmed as the first time I went" in 1993.

A visit to the museum shows the building's enduring appeal. On a recent Saturday morning, schoolchildren from Illinois scrambled through a Polish train car before watching a survivor speaking on a video screen.

A group of gay and lesbian students from Maryland's Mount St. Mary's College lingered in the hushed Hall of Remembrance before continuing to a new exhibit describing Nazi persecution of homosexuals.

African American children wandered through "Daniel's Story," the first-floor children's exhibit.

Travis Miller, a Texas-born cadet from the U.S. Naval Academy, walked out from the main exhibit with his grandparents, Debbie and Lawrence Boy.

"I've been here three times," Miller said. "I had to bring my grandparents."

For all its success, the museum's first decade has been plagued with controversy, often related to the tension between the museum's role as a Jewish institution and its responsibility to the U.S. government. Roughly half of the museum's \$60 million annual operating budget comes from federal coffers, Zeidman says.

The controversies were present at the beginning. Republican financier Harvey "Bud" Meyerhoff, a key player in building the museum, was pushed out as chair of the museum's council after refusing to invite then-Israeli President Chaim Herzog to the opening ceremony in 1993. Meyerhoff had been concerned about

maintaining the American character of the institution, but Herzog eventually spoke at the opening ceremony.

In 1998, as Israeli-Palestinian peace talks continued, the museum invited — and then rescinded — an invitation to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to tour the museum as a visiting dignitary. The museum's director, Walter Reich, refused to extend the invitation. Arafat eventually canceled the planned visit, and Reich soon was ousted.

That same year, Holocaust scholar John Roth was chosen to head the museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. But Roth was forced to resign before starting work after it was discovered that he had written a 1988 piece for the Los Angeles Times that compared Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the Nazi treatment of Jews.

A 1999 congressional report criticized the museum for its lack of professionalism and for the paucity of non-Jews on the governing council. Today, a handful of non-Jews, including poet Maya Angelou, sit on the council.

At the height of the Marc Rich scandal, in early 2001, reporters learned that the then-chairman of the council, Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, had written to President Clinton on museum stationery, asking him to pardon the fugitive financier.

Despite months of controversy and calls from a number of council members for his resignation, Greenberg served out his term.

Zeidman, who was appointed by President Bush, has pledged to keep the museum away from politics and to maintain focus on the museum's goals.

Among those goals are education and outreach. The museum runs educational programs for teachers around the country to come to Washington and develop material for their classes.

After Washington's police chief, Charles Ramsey, visited the museum in 1998, police there began allowing department recruits a day of tolerance training at the museum. Similar programs are run with other local police departments, and with federal bureaus such as the FBI and NSA.

Other efforts aim at the grass roots. The museum has launched a number of traveling exhibitions, and over 350 Washington schoolchildren, most of them African American, have participated in the "Bring the Lessons Home" program, a project that includes a summer internship and educational classes.

The museum also has become a model for the new generation of Washington museums. Its success helped spur the development of Washington's National Museum of the American Indian and the planned National Museum of African American History and Culture. Holocaust museum officials have met with the planners of those other efforts to lend their help, Zeidman said.

Over the next decade, one of the main challenges for the museum will be maintaining its Jewish character.

After all, survivors originally had worried that in opening a museum on federal land, the Holocaust might be enshrined as an event that included Jews, rather than a specifically Jewish event.

"They were still ready to take the risk," said the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, a survivor who sat on the Holocaust Council while the museum was planned and launched.

But Foxman admitted that he and other survivors still worry that future generations maintaining the museum might reduce its Jewish content.

"How do we make sure 20 years from now that 'Shoah' is a word that resonates?" he asks. □