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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Abbas woos Hamas, Jihad

Mahmoud Abbas reportedly offered to include Hamas and Islamic Jihad in a broadened Palestinian leadership.

The Palestinian Authority prime minister's offer reportedly came amid efforts to craft an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire. But Israel criticized the move, saying the P.A. has pledged to dismantle the terrorist groups, not put them in power.

Israel to limit strikes

Israel reportedly agreed to limit its "targeted killings" of Palestinian terrorists to those seen as imminent threats. Israel's agreement, reached this week, appeared to be part of an effort to salvage the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan.

The agreement was reportedly worked out in Washington by President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and Dov Weisglass, an aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Bogus birthrighters nabbed

After catching ineligible participants on its trips, birthright Israel warned organizers against further infractions.

"In the past few days, upon landings of groups at Ben-Gurion International Airport, we have found seven ineligible participants," the group's Israel office wrote in an email to trip organizers.

The program offers a free trip to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds who have never before been on an organized trip to Israel.

The seven ineligible participants, all from North America, were caught after a passport check in Israel. "If we find someone who is ineligible, we are going to send him or her immediately back home," said Gideon Mark, the organization's international marketing director.

Netanyahu meets U.S. leaders

Benjamin Netanyahu told White House officials that the security fence Israel is building will not necessarily be a political border with a future Palestinian state.

The Israeli finance minister met Wednesday with Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and separately with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Israel programs report upswing, as 'abnormality becomes normality'

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Violence and terror in Israel haven't diminished Atara Lindenbaum's desire to visit the Jewish state.

"I know the rules," the Yeshiva University freshman said of her upcoming year of study at a kibbutz outside the West Bank settlement of Efrat. "I don't take buses in Yerushalayim unless they're bulletproof," she said, using the Hebrew term for Jerusalem as she rattles off one of her family's stipulations.

Lindenbaum's brother, Yehoshua, has been studying in Israel for two years, and the family has grown accustomed to the quirks and necessities of life amid terror.

In fact, a grudging acceptance of the fact that Israel periodically hemorrhages from terror may be one reason for a marked rise in attendance on student trips to Israel this summer and in the coming academic year.

With the "road map" peace plan not yet putting an end to the Palestinian intifada, some American Jewish students and their parents have grown tired of postponing the Israel experience.

Additionally, the end of the U.S.-led war on Iraq and, with it, the threat of an Iraqi attack against Israel have eased travel anxieties.

In addition, the past 12 months in Israel have been relatively less violent than the preceding year.

Enrollment in most short-term Israel programs still has not returned to anything near pre-intifada levels, which stripped programs of participants who feared for their security.

But Israel programs are reporting significant increases over 2002, when they had their lowest enrollment in the past decade.

Some yearlong programs, which generally have suffered less from the intifada than have shorter trips, are now approaching or even surpassing their pre-intifada levels.

Overall, trips for this summer and coming year are up by 80 percent, according to Michael Landsberg, executive director of North American aliyah for the Jewish Agency for Israel.

"When abnormality becomes normality," people adapt, he said.

Navah Kogen, 16, who will attend a five-week summer program with the Conservative movement's United Synagogue Youth in Israel, agreed.

"I think people have readjusted their idea of what normal is in Israel as opposed to 1999 and 2000, where we were all expecting peace to be right around the corner. A lot of people are starting to understand that it's going to be a much longer process," said the junior at the Solomon Schechter Day School in West Orange, N.J. "We might be getting a little more complacent with the situation and also a bit more hopeful about where we might be heading."

Indeed, it seems, a creeping sense of optimism has changed the landscape of American programs in Israel.

"Over the last few months there was a sense that this coming year is going to be a good year and an important year to be in Israel," said John Fisher, director of enrollment management at Yeshiva University.

In the coming academic year, the school will send its largest delegation of students to Israel in the program's 25-year history. Of Y.U.'s 2,800 undergraduates, 620 are slated to study in Israel this fall.

Along with the opportunity to "make a statement, to be there to support Israel,"

MIDEAST FOCUS

Experts: Burial box a fake

A burial box that was purported to have once contained the bones of Jesus' brother James is a forgery, Israeli experts said.

"The ossuary is real," said Shuka Dorfman, the director of Israel's Antiquities Authority. "But the inscription is a fake." A committee concluded that the inscription cut through the box's fossilized sheen and was written in modern script.

Authorities also concluded that the "Yoash inscription," a shoe box-sized tablet with 15 lines of ancient Hebrew with instructions for maintaining the Temple in Jerusalem, is a forgery.

When it was first disclosed two years ago, the Yoash inscription caused a stir in the archaeological world, with some experts calling it a rare confirmation of biblical narrative.

Israeli bond offering sets record

Israel has wrapped up its biggest bond issue in history, a \$750 million offering that even attracted investors from the Persian Gulf nation of Dubai. The offering, which spurred \$2 billion in demand, drew 200 investors from around the world, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a gathering of Israeli and American businesspeople in New York this week.

The Dubai investors "aren't exactly fervent Zionists," Netanyahu said, but they are banking on the Israeli economy turning around. Investors, including banks and pension funds, bought the 10-year bonds.

They were sold at a 4.73 percent yield — compared with the current 3.2 percent offered on U.S. bonds — largely due to investors' trust in planned reforms in the Israeli economy and belief that terrorism will buckle under political or military pressure, Netanyahu said.

The bonds, underwritten by the firms of Lehman Brothers and Citigroup, amounted to the biggest government offering in Israeli history.



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Fisher said, "I think there's been optimism that it would be a year that would be relatively safe."

Growth in the program stopped and even dipped slightly over the past two years, with 560 students last year.

In general, Orthodox programs have been least affected by the intifada, with numbers remaining relatively steady.

Birthright Israel, the free trip to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds who have never been on a group trip to Israel, is expecting twice the number of North American participants as it had last summer.

Barring an extraordinary wave of terrorism, the group plans to bring between 3,000 and 3,500 North Americans to Israel, up from 1,500 last summer, said Gideon Mark, international director of marketing and public relations.

While the total number of participants is approaching the level of birthright's early years, the proportion of North Americans among the youth — even with this summer's projected increase — has fallen from about 70 percent to about 50 percent.

Hebrew University, the site of a deadly terrorist attack last summer, doubled its number of applications for summer programs.

Still, with about 450 American applicants for programs starting in the summer and fall, Hebrew University is far short of the 700 American applicants it generally received before the outbreak of the intifada.

"We still have a way to go until we match pre-intifada numbers, but this is certainly a positive upward trend that would suggest that there is a growing number of students committed to study abroad in Israel," said Amy Sugin, director of the American Friends of Hebrew University's office of academic affairs.

Program coordinators also say the quality of the students going to Israel is impressive.

Students visiting Israel today have deeper goals for connecting with Israel, said Neil Weidberg, acting director of Israel programs for Young Judea.

"Kids used to come and want to go to Ben Yehuda Street and climb Masada and that's it," he said, referring to the late 1990s, when his program shuttled 1,300 North American kids to summer programs in Israel.

The 170 North American kids registered for this summer, however, are starting out with a sense of knowledge about and empathy with the Jewish state.

"They know Israel is in the condition it's in, and they want to come and they want to contribute and they want to support Israel," Weidberg said.

The group's Year Course program plans to bring 175 North American students to Israel in the fall, about equal to the pre-intifada enrollment and a jump from 98 students last year.

Parents of course play a critical role in shaping their children's outlook and, ultimately, permitting their attendance.

"I think for a family to be able to send their child to Israel, they have to have a stronger connection to Israel than the parent did when it was just very popular to send your kid to Israel not so many years ago," Weidberg said.

In recent years, USY has run short Israel programs for parent representatives from each of the Conservative youth group's 17 regions.

The trip, which highlights security measures, aims to soothe parents' concerns and allow them to reassure other nervous parents when they return.

"The average parent would have greater credibility than someone who actually works for the organization," said Jules Gutin, international director for USY.

After the June 11 bus bombing in Jerusalem, USY sent a mass e-mail to participants' parents informing them that the Jerusalem market where the incident occurred is off-limits to participants.

It added that the youth group monitors security with guidance from the Jewish Agency for Israel.

For some of the participants, however, the promise of an excursion in the Jewish state trumps security fears.

"When you go, there's a lot more life than death," Lindenbaum said, adding that the life in Israel is "so rich."

She is looking forward to experiencing Israelis' laid-back attitudes, and to being in an environment where "everyone is just going together to learn Torah." □

JEWISH WORLD

NGOs meet on anti-Semitism

Jewish representatives met with human rights organizations in Vienna to discuss putting anti-Semitism on the rights groups' agenda.

Wednesday's seminar, sponsored by the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, came on the eve of a two-day international conference on anti-Semitism convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Qatari anti-Semitism 'offends'

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice says she is "offended" by the "abhorrent anti-Semitism" in the Qatari media.

In a letter to the Anti-Defamation League, Rice said President Bush has made clear that anti-Semitic material in the Arab media is unacceptable.

Christians: Israel wants you

Israel launched a campaign to attract evangelical Christian tourists to the Jewish state.

The campaign, which will begin July 1, features ads with the line, "Don't put your soul on hold." The ads highlight Jesus' connections to the Holy Land. Israel's tourism minister, Benny Elon, and conservative Christian leader Gary Bauer announced the campaign this week.

New York invests in Israel

The New York State Retirement Fund has set aside \$200 million to invest in Israeli infrastructure projects. The \$109 billion pension fund, the second biggest in the United States behind California, will become one of the largest private investors in Israel.

A spokesman for New York state Comptroller Alan Hevesi told Israeli and American businesspeople in New York this week that the move signifies a recognition that there "is a stable and growing economy in Israel," and "allows us to express our solidarity with the State of Israel."

The Markstone Capital Partners Fund, which is handling the investment, pledged to invest \$300 million in projects in Israel.

ZOA lobbies against 'road map'

More than 400 members of the Zionist Organization of America criticized the "road map" peace plan during the group's annual advocacy day in Washington. The members listened as close to a dozen members of Congress criticized the map as too lenient toward Palestinian terrorism.

The group also pushed lawmakers to pass the Koby Mandell Act, which would establish an office within the Department of Justice to ensure that terrorists who kill American citizens abroad are brought to justice.

After reference to his Jewishness, Spanish ad exec loses his soccer bid

By Jerome Socolovsky

MADRID (JTA) — A Spanish advertising executive has lost his campaign to become president of one of Europe's legendary soccer teams after a rival accused him of covering up his Jewish identity.

But Lluís Bassat's Jewishness may have been less important in his failed bid to take over FC Barcelona than the prospect — mistaken in the end — that his rival for the club's ownership might snag one of the world's top soccer figures, England's David Beckham.

In the end, Beckham was sold this week to Barcelona's archenemy, Real Madrid, for \$41 million.

But the reference to Bassat's Jewishness triggered a debate — in newspapers' sports and Op-Ed pages, on talk shows and on the streets of this soccer-crazed nation — about whether a Jew could be head of a soccer club.

Bassat, who is president of the advertising firm Bassat Ogilvy & Mather Europe, got 32 percent of the 50,000 votes cast for president last weekend by the members of the soccer team, affectionately known as "Barca."

Barcelona lawyer Joan Laporta won the election with 52 percent of the vote.

During the campaign, another of the six candidates, Jaume Llauro Gracia, asked Bassat why he only goes by one last name, when most Spaniards use two surnames — that of their father and mother — on official documents.

"We all have a father and a mother, but Bassat never utters his second surname, which is Coen. We'd like him to explain why," Llauro said during a live televised debate, prompting Bassat to walk off the set.

Coen is the Spanish version of Cohen, one local paper explained, and "immediately identifies one as belonging to the international Jewish community."

Bassat is the descendant of Sephardi Jews from Salonika, Greece, who immigrated to Barcelona in the early 20th century. At the time, the Spanish government was reaching out to descendants of Jews who had been expelled from Spain in the Middle Ages and offering them citizenship. Many of them still spoke Spanish and were useful commercial contacts in their native countries.

While Bassat rarely mentions his Jewish heritage in public, he is the founder and a leading benefactor of Barcelona's Reform congregation, Atid.

During the campaign, many political and sports commentators defended his right to keep his religious affiliation out of the race.

A columnist in the La Razon newspaper, Tomas Cuesta, accused Llauro of behaving like a medieval "inquisitor" and of "igniting the smokestacks of Auschwitz."

"I don't use my second surname," said Baltasar Porcel who writes in Barcelona's La Vanguardia newspaper. "Does that make me suspicious?"

But others saw Bassat's Jewishness as a legitimate topic for debate.

On one radio talk show, debaters questioned whether Bassat would be able to participate in all of the club's traditions.

For Barcelona and many other soccer teams in this secular country still steeped in Roman Catholic ritual, the players' first stop after winning a tournament trophy is the local church to offer the prize to the Virgin Mary.

A leader of Barcelona's Palestinian community urged voters not to elect Bassat, warning that he would put the club in the hands of "Jewish American interests."

A source close to Bassat's campaign team said Llauro's comment had a clear effect on the outcome of the election. Before the televised debate, the source noted, Bassat held a comfortable 30 percent margin over other contenders in the opinion polls.

"Everybody thought Bassat would win," the source said. "I don't know how else to explain such a drastic turnaround."

But Isaac Levy, a spokesman for the Barcelona Jewish community, said the comment only cost Bassat "possibly 500 or 1,000 votes."

He thinks Bassat lost because he represented the recent past on a team that has had several horrendous seasons, Levy said. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Jewish leader's drug charge
may also hurt Germany's Jews***By Toby Axelrod*

BERLIN (JTA) — It could hardly be a seedier combination: Drugs and prostitution are threatening to bring down one of Germany's most prominent Jewish figures.

To some extent, the troubles of Michel Friedman, vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and president of the European Jewish Congress, mean trouble for Germany's Jews.

Observers are watching anxiously as the story unfolds in the media, where reports reflect and amplify the public's fascination both with celebrity downfall and with the demise of a prominent Jewish leader.

Some see the Friedman episode as the biggest test yet of postwar Germany's readiness to eschew anti-Semitic stereotypes.

So far, reviews are mixed.

German media quickly picked up and highlighted the story, which involves one of the best-known and most controversial Jewish public figures in Germany. Some media outlets used old photos of Friedman smiling broadly, or receiving Germany's highest medal of honor, to illustrate the seamy news.

"There are, of course, anti-Semitic undertones" in coverage of this story, Henryk Broder, a columnist for the German news weekly *Der Spiegel*, told JTA.

"The shameless expression of Schadenfreude is very, very strong," Broder said, using a German word that means taking delight in the misfortunes of others. "I myself have no connection to Friedman, but I get nasty anti-Semitic e-mail just because of the coincidence of him and me being Jews."

Winston Pickett, director of external relations at the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research, said, "When something like this happens, the higher someone is the farther they fall, and it captures the imagination, regardless of religion and ethnic background.

"When you add that Jewish context, it makes it even more painful," he continued. "It can't help but reflect negatively upon Jews, because they have invested in this person. He represents us."

Alexander Brenner, head of Berlin's Jewish community, said, "This kind of thing does not cause anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitism is there to begin with, whether aimed at a Friedman or a Brenner."

With few exceptions, German media have been all over the story, relishing the details as they have slowly emerged. On June 11, drug-sniffing dogs were set loose in Friedman's Frankfurt home and law office; evidence was confiscated that police say turned out to be cocaine. Friedman offered up hair samples for testing.

Soon, hints of involvement with prostitutes appeared in the media, together with humiliating details about an alias Friedman allegedly used — Paolo Pinkel, which translates roughly as "Paulie Pee-Pee."

Friedman later suspended production of his two TV talk shows. His girlfriend, a prominent TV personality herself, expressed shock and withdrew to her mother's home.

Old dirt also has been dredged up. Two years ago, a cocaine dealer in Frankfurt reportedly named Friedman as a customer during a police interrogation, but an inquiry was dropped due to

lack of evidence. That case now may be reopened.

In the minds of many, Friedman's free fall is paired with that of Jurgen Mollemann, Friedman's political nemesis, who literally free fell recently in a plunge to his death.

Mollemann, a sky-diving enthusiast, refrained from opening his parachute in a June 5 jump that is being considered a suicide.

Mollemann sullied the 2002 national election campaign by blaming Friedman for causing anti-Semitism.

Mollemann's statements elicited general public outrage, and they contributed to the election failure of Mollemann's Free Democratic Party and to the politician's own political isolation.

The media found the links between the Friedman and Mollemann stories too great to ignore. "If there hadn't been the Mollemann scandal with the suicide, I don't think people would have bothered" to finger Friedman, said Elisa Klapheck, editor of *Juedisches Berlin*, the monthly magazine of Berlin's Jewish community. "I am sure it has to do with revenge."

Stephan Kramer, the Central Council's executive director, said he has received a significant amount of mail blaming Friedman and the council for Mollemann's death and wishing that Mollemann had lived to see his rival's disgrace.

One person wrote that the group's name should be changed to the Central Council of Cocaine Abusers of Germany, Kramer said.

If Friedman turns out to be guilty, he could face the loss of his positions on the Central Council and the European Jewish Congress, his two TV talk shows, his membership in the Christian Democratic Union Party and his law practice.

Additionally, Friedman, considered by many to be a gifted public speaker on anti-Semitism and an outspoken supporter of Israel, would likely be seen as a liability to the Jewish community.

Still, there is little official talk of Friedman's dropping out of Jewish public life — yet. Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council, insists on standing by his deputy unless he's proven guilty. The European Jewish Congress has refused to comment on the story.

Predictably, right-wing groups have jumped on the story. The far-right National Democratic Party of Germany featured reports on the Friedman incident on its Web site, under the headline, "This news cannot be emphasized enough."

"There will definitely be a spillover to the collective level, which is a familiar pattern," said Michael Wolffsohn, an expert on German Jewish history and politics at the German Armed Forces University. "The tendency must be combated because whatever Friedman has done or not done, this was his personal, individual decision and way of life. It does not concern the Jewish collective."

The scandal comes in the midst of a renaissance in Germany's Jewish community.

In the last 12 years, the community's size, which had been fairly static since the end of World War II, tripled to 100,000 due to an influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Many ordinary Germans are demonstrating a newfound interest in Jewish life and culture.

In January, the Central Council signed a historic contract with the Federal Republic of Germany, putting it on a legal par with the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Friedman's signature is on the contract.

The Friedman case "is a litmus test for the political capital that has been built up by German Jews throughout the postwar years," Pickett said.

"The case will show — and I hate to say it — how far beneath the surface prejudices may be." □