

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Sharon: Arafat can go to Gaza

Yasser Arafat may travel to the Gaza Strip if he asks to do so, Ariel Sharon said.

The Israeli prime minister made his comment after meeting with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday to discuss ongoing implementation of the "road map" peace plan. Arafat, the P.A. president, has been partially confined to Ramallah for more than a year because of his alleged involvement in terrorism.

Abbas reportedly told Sharon during the meeting that Iran hopes to sponsor more terrorist attacks against Israel, despite a cease-fire that terrorist groups lately have called.

### U.S. considering Palestinian aid

The White House is considering giving direct aid to the Palestinian Authority for social services. White House officials say a welfare-type program in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would help offset some of the social service programs currently run by terrorist organizations, and would make it easier for European and Arab states to cut off funds to Hamas and other groups.

Israeli officials have said such a program would cost about \$1 billion, though the numbers are still under debate. The United States currently sends approximately \$75 million per year to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through the U.S. Agency for International Development.

### N.J. poet canned

New Jersey lawmakers voted to eliminate the position of poet laureate after the current holder, who suggested that Israel carried out the Sept. 11 attacks, refused to leave the post.

The state Assembly on Tuesday approved a bill cutting the \$10,000 stipend for the post after Amiri Baraka refused calls by Gov. James McGreevy to resign, The Associated Press reported.

Baraka, who as a black radical in the 1960s espoused anti-Semitic views, stirred controversy after taking the job last July with his poem, "Somebody Blew Up America."

It reads, in part: "Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed/Who told 4,000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers/To stay home that day/Why did Sharon stay away?"

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### UJC seeks to mediate between Claims Conference and survivors

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish federation system will try to broker a deal between Holocaust survivors and the main survivors restitution organization, which are warring over how to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in restitution.

The United Jewish Communities is scheduled to host a summit July 7 at its Manhattan headquarters between the Claims Conference and the Holocaust Survivors Foundation, which represents some 500 grass-roots survivors groups nationwide.

At stake is a 1995 decision by the Claims Conference to spend 20 percent of the proceeds from sales of unclaimed Jewish property in the former East Germany on Holocaust education, continuing a longtime policy of apportioning some restitution money for education.

So far the Claims Conference has allocated \$450 million from the sale of abandoned or looted East German property, which is ultimately expected to be worth more than \$1 billion when sold.

Of sale proceeds so far, \$170 million has been paid to survivors and their heirs, and \$175 million in claims are still pending, Claims Conference officials say.

The survivors group insists all of the money should go to aid ailing, needy victims.

Survivors contend that some 40 percent of the 127,000 to 145,000 survivors nationwide subsist on meager earnings and lack adequate medical coverage. The restitution money earmarked for education could help pay the \$30 million needed to care for aging survivors in their final years, they say.

The Claims Conference maintains that the 80 percent of proceeds from the sale of recovered properties in the former East Germany that it allocates to survivors has funded social welfare programs both in the United States and in places such as Israel and the former Soviet Union, where many elderly survivors are destitute.

In addition to reparations for looted Jewish art, homes, businesses and communal properties in the former East Germany, the Claims Conference allocates money recovered from looted Swiss bank accounts, reparations for forced German Jewish labor and unpaid wartime insurance policies.

Of the organization's overall \$769 million budget for 2001, education and research only amounted to 1 percent, the Claims Conference insists.

Survivors are not buying that argument, and hope the UJC meeting will change the Claims Conference's spending habits.

"We believe very much in Holocaust education, but there are plenty of museums, thousands of books, hundreds of documentaries. There is no shortage of Holocaust education and awareness," said Leo Rechter, 75, of New York, a survivor and secretary of the survivors foundation.

"You have to set your priorities straight. If you have a parent sick and dying and you need to spend money on medication, you don't go buy a luxury car," he said.

The executive vice president of the Claims Conference, Gideon Taylor, said only that his group would "give a briefing on issues related to the allocation of restitution" at the UJC session.

A spokeswoman for the Claims Conference, Hillary Kessler-Godin, defended the group's goal of "preserving the memory" of Holocaust survivors in addition to directly aiding them.

The Claims Conference "believes it has an obligation to educate future generations

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Palestinian killed in West Bank

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian who fired on them in the West Bank on Tuesday.

The troops returned fire Tuesday near the city of Tulkarm after a Palestinian fired on them with a pistol. There were no Israeli casualties.

### Unauthorized mosque demolished

Israel demolished the foundations of an unauthorized mosque near a Christian holy site in Nazareth. Tuesday's demolition came after an Israeli court had ruled that the mosque was being built without proper permits.

The construction of the mosque, on a plot next to the Basilica of the Annunciation, has been a source of tension between Christians and Muslims in the city in recent years.

### Israeli Arab charged

An Israeli Arab was charged Tuesday with planning a suicide bombing at a Haifa mall.

Munzar Hatib, 19, reportedly was asked to carry out the attack himself, but refused and suggested instead that he supply the ammunition to a would-be bomber.

### Sharon to visit Norway

Israel's prime minister will discuss the peace process in Norway with his Norwegian counterpart. Ariel Sharon will travel to Oslo on July 16 at the invitation of the Norwegian leader.

### Israeli team making tennis history

An Israeli doubles team advanced to the semifinals of the Wimbledon tennis tournament.

Yoni Erlich and Andy Ram won in straight sets over a second-seeded team Tuesday to become the first Israelis to advance to the penultimate round of tennis' most prestigious championships.



## Daily News Bulletin

Norman H. Lipoff, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

about the Holocaust and about the lives of those who perished," she said.

This debate began raging anew when the Claims Conference's president, Rabbi Israel Singer, floated a proposal a year ago to funnel some money from the various restitution fronts — which together total about \$11 billion — into a new fund for Holocaust documentation, education and research.

Singer's proposal ignited long-standing tensions between the Claims Conference and some survivors.

The debate also will surface at the Claims Conference board of directors' annual meeting July 22-23, when the board is scheduled to take up the allocations issue, Kessler-Godin said.

Some senior Holocaust Foundation officials said they already have held a conference call to discuss the formula with Claims Conference officials in advance of the UJC meeting, and hope to arrange a subsequent meeting before the Claims Conference board meets.

One survivor said a proposal has been bandied about to change the 80-20 split to 95-5 — though the Holocaust Foundation's attorney, Samuel Dubbin, declined to discuss details. "If we cut it down to 5 percent, we wouldn't argue," the survivor said.

A Claims Conference source said only that several alternatives have been discussed.

"There have been many viewpoints expressed, including views by survivors and others that the policy should be maintained, or even some arguing for a greater priority" for education, the Claims Conference source said.

Taylor of the Claims Conference also pointed out that many survivor activists, like Roman Kent, belong to the group and back the education spending. He added that some other restitution groups, such as the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah in France, spend all of their funding on education.

In order for the Claims Conference to change its policy, the board would have to take a formal vote, and a majority would have to support it.

The UJC is not officially connected with the Claims Conference and holds no organizational sway over its policies on restitution spending.

But an intense lobbying campaign by Holocaust survivors over the past few years moved several major federation leaders to publicly call to change the 80-20 formula.

Federation officials joined the debate in part because they aid some of the same social causes.

Federations often help fund Jewish family and childrens service agencies, which also receive money from the Claims Conference to spend on survivor assistance.

Those federation calls sparked a March referendum by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the umbrella body for local Jewish community relations councils, urging the Claims Conference to reconsider the 80-20 split.

Among the most vocal critics of the Claims Conference plan in the federation system was Barry Shrage, president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, who praised the UJC for stepping in.

"All of us who are on the advocacy side of this are advocating for all the available resources to be used for relief efforts for survivors here and overseas," Shrage said. "The Holocaust education agenda can wait a little bit."

But the meeting is being kept quiet.

One supporter of the survivors who said he will attend is Jacob Solomon, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Miami, who is due to join 15-20 federation executives at the session.

Solomon refused to discuss the UJC's attempt to bring the two sides together.

Dubbin, the attorney for the Holocaust Foundation, said only that the UJC launched the peacemaking effort "on their initiative," and that he plans to participate.

One figure who supports spending more on direct survivor needs is Elan Steinberg, a member of the executive of the World Jewish Congress, which is a Claims Conference member group.

"The interests of survivors should not merely have priority; they should have absolute priority," Steinberg said.

UJC officials, meanwhile, remained mum on the matter. Lorraine Blass, a senior planner at UJC who is heading up a committee to study the issue, declined to discuss the meeting and said it would remain private.

But she did predict that subsequent meetings on the matter would take place. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### **Girl attacked in Berlin**

A teen-aged girl wearing a Star of David necklace was attacked in Berlin. Several other teen-aged girls reportedly attacked the 14-year-old in a case initially reported to the police on June 27.

The girl suffered light injuries.

Similar attacks have occurred in Germany in recent months.

### **White House names liaison**

Tevi Troy, a White House policy adviser, has been named the new liaison to the Jewish community. Troy has been a domestic policy adviser and worked in the Labor Department on congressional affairs, according to the Forward newspaper.

### **UJC names pillar chair**

Michael Lebovitz was named chair of the United Jewish Communities' financial resource development division.

Lebovitz, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Greater Chattanooga and national vice chair of the UJC, will oversee the federation umbrella group's efforts to strengthen fund raising by North American federations.

Lebovitz, 39, a national developer, owner and manager of shopping malls, succeeds Carole Solomon, now the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors.

### **\$3.6 million from Swiss banks**

The Claims Conference recently paid \$3.6 million from the Swiss banks settlement to needy survivors. The leading Holocaust restitution group, which distributes money from cases including the Swiss banks settlement, said it was allocating the money to survivors in 23 countries this year.

The allocations are part of a 10-year deal, reached with the banks in 2000, to pay \$33 million to survivors and their heirs from money looted by the Nazis. To date, the Claims Conference has paid \$8.8 million in emergency assistance to needy survivors, and in 2002 sent \$2.5 million in emergency aid to survivors worldwide.

### **O.U. joins Bush on vouchers**

Officials from the Orthodox Union joined President Bush in support of a school choice initiative. President Bush and O.U. officials were at Kipp Key Community School in Washington on Tuesday to endorse a program that would give Washington public school children a chance to use scholarship money to leave failing schools.

Many liberal Jews oppose such vouchers, saying they violate the constitutional separation between church and state.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### **In Argentine provinces, downturn leads to exodus of Jewish leaders**

*By Florencia Arbiser*

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Elena Roitman is trying to fill some empty Jewish posts in her Santa Fe community.

The Jewish school's Hebrew director made aliyah in recent months, as did another local Jewish leader. So far, almost 80 Jewish families — or nearly 10 percent of the community — have left Santa Fe for Israel in the last 18 months.

The situation in Santa Fe, located about 300 miles north of the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires, epitomizes the plight smaller Argentine Jewish communities face as the country struggles with its second consecutive year of economic turmoil.

Outside of the capital, the suffering "is more palpable," said Ana Weinstein, director of the Argentine federation of Jewish communities, or Va'ad Hakehilot. The group is a division of the AMIA, Argentina's central Jewish institution.

Va'ad Hakehilot gives support and assistance to communities in the provinces by running training programs for leaders, analyzing what each community needs and helping communities find economic support.

About 15 percent of Argentina's roughly 200,000 Jews live in the provinces, Weinstein says. But nearly 29 percent of the families that made aliyah in 2002 were from smaller towns and rural areas, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The result is damage to the institutions that are the fabric of Jewish life in those areas: synagogues, day schools and clubs. Even worse, in Santa Fe those who left were among the most active members of the community.

"There are so many people from our Jewish community in the U.S.," said Raquel Gura, 65.

"Our former temple chazan is now a chazan in Malibu," she said of her synagogue's cantor. "Our present chazan is leaving to do his work in New York. We even joke that in our community we make such good chazans that we could advertise, 'If you want to live in the U.S., be a chazan in Santa Fe.'"

Argentina's economic troubles are only part of the reason for the exodus. Students frequently also leave their small towns to study in Buenos Aires or abroad. Many of them never return.

"Under these conditions, the difficulty in maintaining the continuity of Jewish life is huge," Weinstein said.

Taken together, the two factors leave many communities without the proper professionals to lead them.

Furthermore, the economic crisis has made it impossible to afford rabbis: Until only a few months ago, many community centers only had a rabbi for special celebrations.

This situation now is improving, thanks to support from local and foreign donors.

In addition, younger rabbis who recently have graduated are being hired because their salaries are lower than those of more experienced counterparts.

Only four months ago, after nine years without a rabbi, Daniel Dolinsky, 34, was hired as Santa Fe's rabbi and school director.

"When leaders leave, a hole has to be covered to continue working with hundreds of families," said Dolinsky, who graduated from a rabbinical seminary last year.

There are 300 children at Santa Fe's Jewish day school. Unlike other cities, there are three synagogues, all of which have remained open. The largest, which has about 250 members, is part of the Jewish community center. Elsewhere in town, a Sephardi shul draws about 30 people for services and an Orthodox one gets about 15.

Dolinsky says 50 families have returned to the Jewish community to seek help because of economic problems.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which provides much of the social-welfare assistance in the provinces, is training volunteers and developing specific programs in some communities.

For her part, Roitman says she is learning more in order to fill the gaps left by those who have emigrated. "I am receiving training to improve my knowledge of Judaism in order to help in the community," she said. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

## With flip and then flop, minister moves toward religious revolution

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel this week moved a step closer to a religious revolution.

For the first time in the history of the Jewish state, there is a good chance that those who convert to Judaism in Israel through the Reform and Conservative movements will receive automatic Israeli citizenship.

"I will inform the High Court of Justice that I will register every convert who wishes to do so as an Israeli citizen — regardless of whether his conversion took place in Israel or abroad, or whether it was an Orthodox or non-Orthodox conversion," Israel's interior minister, Avraham Poraz, told JTA.

Representatives of the liberal movements in the United States praise the possible change as a major step toward religious pluralism in Israel — while Orthodox leaders view it as one that would undermine the character of the Jewish state.

The statement by Poraz, a member of the secular Shinui Party, comes as an issue that long has troubled relations between Israel and Diaspora Jewry may soon be reopened.

Israel's high court is slated to hand down a ruling soon in the case of an appeal by 18 Reform converts against previous interior ministers' refusals to grant them Israeli citizenship.

In recent governments, interior ministers — who often belonged to the fervently Orthodox Shas Party — refused to register non-Orthodox converts who had converted in Israel, arguing that only Orthodox conversions supervised by the Chief Rabbinate should be legitimate in the Jewish state. However, they did recognize conversions performed overseas.

A high court ruling last year forced the Interior Ministry to register local converts as Jews in the national Population Administration — but the ministry usually refused to grant them Israeli citizenship.

When he was appointed earlier this year, many expected Poraz to change the policy — though until this week it seemed he had other plans.

Poraz originally said he wanted to separate the issue of conversions from citizenship, making citizenship decisions based on the applicant's "contribution to society and identification with the Zionist movement, or on humanitarian grounds."

That meant he wouldn't grant automatic citizenship even to people who had undergone Orthodox conversions in Israel — but he would consider granting citizenship to non-Jews, such as sports stars, musicians or scientists, who had made significant contributions to Israeli life.

The idea infuriated leaders of all streams of Judaism.

"It is unacceptable that people will be recognized as Jews but will not have the right to live here," Rabbi Uri Regev, executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, as the Reform movement is known, told JTA.

With Poraz's about-face this week, the liberal movements are pleased once again.

"Israel is the state of all Jews, not just those who accept one particular interpretation," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in New York, who met with Poraz on June 25.

"I'm delighted that there is a growing number of Jews in Israel and in the leadership in Israel who are willing to help strengthen Jewish life by recognizing the diversity and the pluralism that is necessary," said Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, also in New York.

Poraz's shift came after pressure from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Israel's attorney general, Elyakim Rubinstein.

When Poraz announced his original intentions, Rubinstein wrote a sharply worded letter to Sharon, charging that Poraz's new criteria would upset the customary conversion procedure and conceivably could allow more than 100,000 resident non-Jews — such as illegal foreign workers and their children — to receive Israeli citizenship.

Sharon reprimanded Poraz at a tense meeting last week.

"Israel is a Jewish state and it must remain such," Sharon said. He insisted that only conversions approved in Israel by a rabbinical court under government supervision should grant Israeli citizenship to converts.

Poraz agreed that he would no longer withhold citizenship from converts — as long as the liberal movements' converts were accepted as well.

Of course, not everyone is pleased with Poraz's move.

"How you do a conversion to Judaism is governed by rules that have developed" over thousands of years, said Harvey Blitz, president of the U.S.-based Orthodox Union.

Orthodox conversions conform to those rules, while liberal conversions don't, Blitz said.

"This looks to me like another effort by Poraz and Shinui to change the Jewish character of the state" and "create more friction with regard to the religious affairs in Israel," Blitz said.

In Israel, the National Religious Party — which is in the government — and Shas — which is not — have remained quiet so far.

For his part, Poraz believes the NRP will not make waves.

"Don't forget that we have plenty of spare parts to replace the NRP — in the Labor Party," said Poraz, referring to Labor's apparent willingness to back Sharon's coalition if the NRP bolts the government over the issue.

In the meantime, everyone's waiting for the court ruling to make the next move.

"The ball has returned to the High Court of Justice," Regev said. □

(JTA Staff Writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)

## France: Swim together

PARIS (JTA) — French cities should not provide special single-sex swimming hours in municipal baths for religious groups, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy said.

Speaking Sunday on the Europe 1 radio station, Sarkozy said the government would "not tolerate" separate swimming arrangements.

Various municipalities in France provide separate swimming hours for religious Muslims, and the Paris suburb of Sarcelles provides for the needs of the town's large Orthodox Jewish population. Last week, the mayor of Paris 19th District, home to one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities in France, rejected a demand for separate swimming in municipal pools. □