

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Baby formula firm comes clean

A German company admitted that its baby formula, implicated in the deaths of three Israeli babies, didn't contain Vitamin B1. Representatives of Humana said the missing vitamin, also known as thiamine, was the result of human error. [Page 4]

Arafat controls the money

Some \$34 million of the Palestinian Authority's budget is managed solely by Yasser Arafat, the International Monetary Fund has found. The Palestinian Authority president transfers the money to undefined "organizations" and "individuals" who cannot be traced, Ha'aretz reported.

The report also puts the P.A.'s security services at 56,128 men, almost 20,000 more than the number allowed under the Oslo accords. News of the IMF report comes after CBS' "60 Minutes" reported that Arafat has diverted \$800 million in aid money for the Palestinian Authority to a private account for his family in Paris.

BBC takes cover

The BBC appointed an ombudsman to monitor its Middle East coverage. The naming of veteran journalist Malcolm Balen comes after the network has endured criticism for what some see as its pro-Palestinian coverage and its opposition to the war in Iraq.

Earlier this year, Israeli officials stopped granting interviews to BBC journalists after it decided a documentary produced by the network was very anti-Israel.

Senate backs Syria bill

The Senate passed a bill to punish Syrian support for terrorism. On Tuesday, the Senate passed the Syria Accountability Act by a vote of 89-4. The act calls for the United States to punish Syria for harboring terrorist organizations and seeking to acquire nuclear technology.

The legislation, passed by the House of Representatives last month, is backed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and several other Jewish groups.

The Bush administration, which once opposed the legislation, has said it would back it. The four lawmaker who opposed the measure were Sens. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.), Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Jim Jeffords (I-Vt.).

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Raising the bar for Reform Jews, from shofar blowing to daily Torah

By Joe Berkofsky

MINNEAPOLIS (JTA) — At Temple Congregation Ohabei Shalom in Nashville, Tenn., congregants newly trained in the ancient skill of shofar-blowing sounded the ceremonial ram's horn for the first time this past Rosh Hashanah.

It was the first time a lay member of the 150-year-old temple had blown the shofar.

"It was quite a pivotal moment" for the 800-family congregation, said its rabbi, Mark Schiftan. Deeply rooted in classical Reform Judaism, the temple's services until recently were marked by choirs and English-only prayer.

This Reform movement charter synagogue is undergoing upheaval, and it's not alone.

A journey toward religious tradition, accompanied by musical innovation, is reshaping many of the more than 920 member synagogues of the Reform movement.

The change is not new but it marks a continuing evolution for the movement, which just officially changed its name to the Union for Reform Judaism, shedding its old moniker, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The name change was one of several changes at the group's 67th biennial convention in Minneapolis last week.

Many of those changes have come from the top. The union's president, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, signaled a historic shift in North America's largest liberal Jewish denomination at its 1999 biennial with a worship initiative urging synagogues to use more Hebrew in prayer and reassess communal worship.

His call came after a statement of principles by the movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, which had met in Pittsburgh earlier that year, sought "renewed attention" to Jewish commandments, or mitzvot.

Last week, Yoffie tried to nudge the movement even further, calling for Reform Jews to log onto a "Ten Minutes of Torah" Internet program. The Torah, he said during his Shabbat morning speech at the biennial, "is the engine that drives Jewish life."

"Such a commitment would enable us to meet our Jewish obligation to make Jewish study a fixed occurrence," Yoffie said.

Yoffie is the first to admit that many of North America's estimated 1.5 million Reform Jews may find the idea foreign.

Since his initial calls four years ago, Reform Jewry has embraced more intensive religious study "conceptually," but not in practice, Yoffie said in an interview.

"There is a core, committed elite that is studying," he said. "On the ground, results are strong in some areas, less strong in others."

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, a professor of liturgy at the movement's seminary in New York, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, said that when it comes to congregational worship, "Reform is all over the map."

Hoffman spoke at a conference panel that examined how Reform congregations are responding to Yoffie's 1999 calls.

Change "is a process; everybody knows it takes seven to 10 years," Hoffman said. Indeed, exhortation to change has become a movement fixture.

After World War II, the UAHC's then-president Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath began moving Reform away from its roots. His successors, first Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then Yoffie, who took over in 1996, followed that path, each one raising the bar further.

For many of the 4,500 movement members who gathered in Minneapolis, change

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arabs mock Israeli bill

Arab states said they would oppose an Israeli-sponsored U.N. resolution condemning Palestinian attacks on Israeli children.

The resolution, which is expected to reach a vote this week in a General Assembly committee, mirrored the language of an Egyptian-sponsored resolution expressing concern that Palestinian children "under Israeli occupation remain deprived of many basic human rights." The Egyptian resolution was approved last week. Palestinian U.N. envoy Nasser al-Kidwa said Arab delegates viewed the Israeli draft "as a bad joke" that should be voted down. Ariel Milo, director of communications at Israel's U.N. mission, called the Arab reaction "very sad and disturbing."

Jenin film cleared

Israel's Supreme Court overturned a ban on a documentary-style film accusing Israel's army of atrocities in a 2002 battle in Jenin. "Jenin, Jenin," directed by Israeli Arab actor Mohammed Bakri, was banned by the country's Film Ratings Board following complaints by families of 23 soldiers who were killed in the West Bank refugee camp in April 2002.

The Supreme Court agreed with Bakri's appeal that the ban violated free speech legislation. A U.N. investigation determined that no massacre took place in Jenin and found no evidence to support charges made in Bakri's film, including one that the Israeli army dug a mass grave in the camp.

Synagogue attack averted

A Palestinian was arrested after allegedly attempting to carry out a failed suicide bombing in a synagogue. On Tuesday, the Shin Bet said it arrested the West Bank man based on intelligence that he had planned an attack inside an Israeli settlement's synagogue after failing to penetrate tight security around the Israeli city of Afula.

remains an article of faith. Daily and evening prayer sessions throughout the week echoed to crowds of dozens, with those praying donning yarmulkes and prayer shawls. The event also saw its first all-Hebrew prayer session.

The workshops on religious themes were crowded too, including those on delivering a d'var Torah, or text-based teaching, learning to chant from the Torah, creating High Holiday liturgy and experiencing a yoga minyan.

Some were not surprised by Yoffie's renewed call for commitment, if only because it signaled another step in the movement's evolution.

"Certainly the bar has been raised," said Rabbi Joe Black, of Congregation Albert in Albuquerque, N.M. "One of the things Rabbi Yoffie has done throughout his tenure is place Torah at the center of the Reform movement."

But Black said he and his 700-household congregation, "haven't necessarily responded to the call for more tradition — the call was a reflection of what was happening for many years."

In his eight years at the 107-year-old synagogue, Black said he has seen a boom in adult education, with classes in Hebrew, prayer and Jewish history. Twice a month, the synagogue offers Shabbat Torah study, which alternates with two meditation sessions.

Many Reform rabbis and cantors in the movement lead services with a guitar — several even held a biennial workshop on music and prayer.

Black has also produced several compact disks. He leads an informal, musical Shabbat service, which relies on a prayer book the congregation designed that transliterates the Hebrew and includes gender-neutral references to God, as well as a monthly Friday night family Shabbat service featuring a puppet show for kids.

A similar mix flavors the rituals at Nashville's Temple Congregation Ohabei Shalom. Once a month, some 200 people typically gather there for "Blue Jean Shabbat," featuring a five-piece band playing music by the likes of the renowned Debbie Friedman. The cantor, Bernard Gutcheon, strums guitar.

While about 40 percent of Ohabei Shalom's services now contain Hebrew — using the Gates of Prayer book, which was published in 1975 and offers alternative Shabbat prayers — older members still attend more classical Reform services three times a year using the Union Prayer Book, first published in 1895.

The Albuquerque and Nashville temples are among those who have experimented with the movement's new prayer book, Mishkan Tefilah, which is due to be published in 2005. The new prayer book includes prayers in Hebrew, with translations and transliterations, commentary on the prayers, source references and songs.

Beth Haverim, a 280-family congregation in Mahwah, N.J., is also experimenting with the new book. Beth Haverim's rabbi, Joel Mosbacher, said that while he feels the new prayer book's inclusion of transliterated Hebrew prayers is a crutch allowing people to avoid learning Hebrew, he found that prayer participation among his congregants skyrocketed since its introduction.

"Even as we shift to the right, you have to acknowledge that people aren't there yet with their knowledge base," he said.

Like other congregations, Beth Haverim is trying to fill that gap, using about 60 percent Hebrew in its services, but offering adult education such as Hebrew instruction, Friday night book reviews and an introduction to Judaism course that doubles as a refresher for Jews and a primer for non-Jewish members.

At the same time, Beth Haverim's cantor, Barbra Lieberstein, has created such services as pop-infused Rock Shabbat, and has brought in a classically and jazz-trained pianist for the High Holidays.

HUC's Hoffman joked that in Reform worship, "the three most important things are music, music and music."

In Reform spiritual life, said Black, "we're moving from an emphasis on pediatric Judaism, where you drop your kids off at school, to lifelong learning."

Despite all the signs of fervor at the biennial, Yoffie said he does not delude himself about what's happening at the grass-roots level, since such summits largely draw the movement's leadership.

At the same time, he said, "If you walk into the average Reform synagogue now as opposed to 10 years ago, you will see that worship is appreciably different."

"Have we seen change?" he asked. "Yes. Are we done? We're never done." □



Daily News Bulletin

Howard E. Friedman, *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.
© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Sharon backs Chirac

Ariel Sharon said French President Jacques Chirac is committed to fighting anti-Semitism in France. "I know that Chirac is serious about fighting anti-Semitism," the Israeli prime minister said Sunday during a speech to more than 400 French Jewish leaders who were on a solidarity visit to Israel.

Sharon's remarks were echoed by the head of the CRIF organization of French Jews, Roger Cukierman, who said he is "satisfied by the government's action in fighting anti-Semitism." But Cukierman added that French Middle East policy remains "unbalanced" in favor of the Palestinians.

Rep wants defense official fired

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) called for Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin to be fired as deputy undersecretary of defense. Now under investigation by the Pentagon's inspector general, Boykin has drawn fire for publicly suggesting that the United States is fighting a religious war against Muslim countries such as Somalia.

Hoyer spoke before some 70 people at B'nai Tzedek Congregation in Potomac, Md. on Sunday, according to the Washington Jewish Week.

Greek composer blasts Jews

Jews are the "root of evil," a leading Greek composer said. At a news conference this week publicizing his new book, Mikis Theodorakis, who scored the music for the film "Zorba the Greek," also said that the Jews "are full of self-importance and evil stubbornness," the Jerusalem Post reported.

Israeli officials released a statement calling on Greek officials to condemn Theodorakis' remarks.

Poland honors rescuer of Jews

The Polish government honored a woman who smuggled 2,500 children out of the Warsaw Ghetto. On Monday, Irena Sendler, 93, received Poland's highest honor, the Order of the White Eagle, for her efforts.

During the war, she posed as a nurse treating Jews for typhoid and smuggled Jewish children out of the ghetto. She then placed them in Polish homes and in orphanages.

ADL picks female chairwoman

The Anti-Defamation League named its first female national chairwoman. Barbara Balsler also is the first Southerner to hold the position. Balsler is co-chair and CEO of Balsler Companies, a think tank that designs benefit programs for corporations.

Lilith up for award

Lilith, a Jewish feminist magazine, was nominated for an award for its spiritual coverage by the Utne Reader, an alternative magazine.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Ohio's pro-Palestinian conference passes without very much fanfare

By Tami Kamin-Meyer

COLUMBUS, Ohio (JTA)—After months of anticipation and a weekend of Jewish counter-activism, a national pro-Palestinian conference has passed without much fanfare.

Jews had debated the best strategy to confront the Third Student Conference of the Palestine Solidarity Movement, held Nov. 7-9 at Ohio State University.

Jewish activists from as far away as Milwaukee and New York streamed to Columbus to protest the Palestinian event, while members of the local Jewish community urged them to keep a low profile.

Still, nearly 200 Israel supporters from across the United States, more than half of them from Cleveland, joined in a cacophony of chants, songs and prayers on a sunny but chilly afternoon outside the building where the pro-Palestinian conference was held.

Inside, Palestinian supporters differed on whether it was okay to support suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks against Israelis.

"Suicide bombings are an inhumane defense that are a result of dehumanizing actions by the Israeli political and military establishment," said Sophia Sahouri, a college student from the Washington area. "Certain extreme factions within Palestinian society resort to this violent behavior because of their frustration and desperation."

The conference's keynote speaker was Adam Shapiro, a Jew who has been an organizer of the International Solidarity Movement, and who holed up at Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah in March 2002 to safeguard the Palestinian Authority president during Israel's Operation Defensive Shield, an anti-terrorist operation.

According to Nahla Saleh, an OSU graduate student in education who served as media spokesperson for the conference, the movement issued "no clear condemnation of suicide bombings, but also did not express support for them, either."

Throughout the weekend, those attending the conference and those protesting it exchanged taunts and shouts. Physical violence seemed likely only once, on Friday evening, when some 50 conference attendees, Israel supporters and curious onlookers mingled haphazardly in a war of words, slogans and songs.

Under tight security and the watchful eye of the OSU department of student affairs, Palestinians chanted "Allahu akbar," or God is great, while Jews responded with strains of "Am Yisrael Chai," the people of Israel live.

Israel supporters came to "be a counter voice to the hate speech," said Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, vice president of Amcha-The Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

However, Columbus' Jews discouraged people from protesting the conference.

In a Nov. 5 e-mail distributed in the Columbus Jewish community, Marsha Hurwitz, president and CEO of the Columbus Jewish Federation, wrote, "We should not demonstrate, rally or protest at the PSM conference. It is believed that our presence on campus in protest will likely result in more attention by students and/or media than the PSM would otherwise receive."

Rather than formally protesting the conference, local Jewish organizations decided to increase their pro-Israel programming, and local federations sponsored a speech Sunday by Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, at the local Jewish community center.

"Their response is not strong enough," Amcha's Herzfeld said. "The Columbus Jewish Federation tried to keep us out, but there was hatred being spewed on campus and it needed an answer."

The conference ended Sunday as noisily as it had begun, but with a twist. Seventy-two conference attendees marched silently, arms linked, to their closing rally.

As Israel supporters chanted "baby killers" and "not one inch," the marchers lined up three deep, stone-faced, with their backs to the Jews.

Suddenly, after five minutes, one conference attendee began yelling, "Tear down the wall." Marchers joined the chant, their backs still turned away from the Jewish protesters. Then they walked away.

After they left, Amcha's president, Rabbi Avi Weiss, told those assembled, "Wherever they go, we will go. We will be the voice of moral conscience." □

Faulty baby-food formula kills 3 and sets off panic among Jews

By Dan Baron

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Frenzied families rush to hospitals. Grim-faced scientists call news conferences. Police mount nighttime raids. In Israel, the Mossad launches a probe of a possible international terrorist connection.

No, it's not another outbreak of the deadly SARS virus.

It's a baby-food scandal.

Panic and precautions followed revelations this week that a popular kosher baby-food formula was defective, implicated in Israel in the deaths of three babies and the hospitalization of at least another 17.

Israel's Health Ministry ordered the product, called Remedia Super Soya 1, removed from store shelves and issued a nationwide alert.

More than 10,000 worried parents called hotlines operated by the baby-food company and Israel's health maintenance organizations.

Bearing the kosher certification of Israel's fervently Orthodox Eida Charedit, the product is marketed in Israel's fervently Orthodox neighborhoods.

In Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods in the United States where the kosher formula is sold, ambulances drove through the streets warning parents by loudspeaker — on the Sabbath — about the defect.

"How could this sort of thing happen in our country? Why did no one check?" one Israeli columnist, Michal Gurevitch, asked in the daily Ma'ariv newspaper. "Baby food is meant to be the safest thing there is. Because if that is not safe, nothing is safe."

Israeli lab tests found Remedia lacking in Vitamin B1, also known as thiamine, whose deficiency in infants can cause vomiting, diarrhea, seizures and lack of appetite.

The resulting symptoms of encephalopathy or beriberi can cause irreparable damage and death.

Israeli experts said the vitamin may have been further thinned by natural decay in the formula.

B1, vital for the development of the central nervous system in babies, was listed as an ingredient on the packages of the formula, a kosher, soy-based milk substitute popular in Israel's fervently Orthodox communities.

The German company that makes Remedia, Humana, at first denied responsibility for the faulty product, standing by the nutritional integrity of its formula.

But company officials admitted Tuesday that the baby food contained less than 10 percent of the quantity of the vitamin that was on the label.

"What we are looking at here is an unfortunate chain of events," said Albert Grosse Frie, a spokesman for the Humana Milchunion group. He stressed that this was a one-time mistake for the company, and "does not affect any of our other products."

Two class-action lawsuits in Israel already have been filed against Remedia, which is majority owned by the American H.J. Heinz Co.

Heinz tried to distance itself from the scandal.

"We don't run" Remedia, said Debbie Foster, vice president of corporate communication for Heinz. "We're a shareholder

company with Remedia. It's a very sorrowful situation. It's really quite tragic."

Compounding the panic in Israel was the fact the manufacturing firm, Humana, was German and the fatal disease was beriberi, an ailment that ran rampant in World War II internment camps.

The Shin Bet internal security service and the Mossad were alerted to the possibility of sabotage, raising fears of international terrorism.

Meanwhile, a Health Ministry delegation flew to Germany to inspect the plant where the formula is made.

Israel's state prosecutor, Edna Arbel, authorized a police investigation of Remedia on Monday.

An estimated 5,000 Israeli infants have used the formula in recent months. After the revelations, clinics in Israel reported a rush on their emergency B-1 injections.

In New York on Saturday, the Hatzolah Volunteer Ambulance Corps dispatched its drivers on the Jewish Sabbath to patrol the streets of Orthodox neighborhoods to warn parents.

Because it was a life-or-death matter, the Sabbath prohibition against driving did not apply, explained Hatzolah's president, Heshey Jacob.

The handful of stores in Brooklyn that carried Remedia products removed them after New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene issued a public warning.

The department sent a health alert to physicians throughout the city and a news release bearing a photograph of a Remedia can.

"We have not yet seen cases of illness linked with this product in New York City, and we do not yet conclusively know whether Remedia has been used here," Commissioner Dr. Thomas Frieden said in the news release.

"While Remedia may not pose an immediate health risk to children, vitamin B1 deficiency does have serious health consequences. If you have fed your infant soy-based Remedia, see your physician immediately to determine if your child needs vitamin supplements," the statement said.

Frieden said it is important to be clear that Remedia does not have a contagious or toxic effect.

"The formula, according to available information, is not toxic," he said. "Only through the exclusive use of Remedia can the affected formula be harmful."

In Israel, retribution against the company came swiftly.

Police already have raided Remedia's Israeli offices, and officials said company executives could face charges of criminal negligence.

Remedia had not informed Israel's Health Ministry that the formula's ingredients had been changed in April, according to the ministry's food and nutrition service director.

On Tuesday, a Remedia attorney told the Knesset's Labor and Social Affairs Committee that Humana removed B1 from the formula on the assumption that the formula already contained a sufficient amount of the vitamin.

But Israeli officials did not accept that explanation.

Remedia "deceived and betrayed the trust of the Health Ministry and the public, but it was impossible to know whether this was intentional or not," said the ministry's director general, Boaz Lev. □

(The New York Jewish Week's Steve Lipman and the Jewish Chronicle of Pittsburgh's Stephanie Siegel contributed to this report.)