

## IN THE NEWS

**Yasser Arafat  
evicts fugitives**

Yasser Arafat evicted 20 suspected terrorists from his headquarters after harboring them for months.

Palestinian Authority sources said Arafat threw out the Al-Aksa Brigade members early Thursday after hearing rumors that Israeli forces might raid his compound in Ramallah to nab them.

The brigade is the terrorist wing of Arafat's Fatah faction, and scores of its members have found refuge in the compound during Israeli sweeps of the West Bank.

**In Geneva, U.N.  
blasts anti-Semitism**

The U.N. Human Rights Commission blasted anti-Semitism in a record number of references.

The Geneva-based commission, which concludes a six-week session Friday, condemned anti-Semitism in three resolutions. Along with Islamophobia and, for the first time, Christianophobia, the commission condemned anti-Semitism in two resolutions on racism and one on religious intolerance, said Felice Gaer of the American Jewish Committee's Blaustein Institute.

**Report: Anti-Semitic  
violence up in Russia**

Anti-Jewish incidents in Russia became more violent in 2003, according to a new report.

The report by the Anti-Defamation League's Moscow office, released Thursday, said Russia's federal government has made some positive steps in dealing with anti-Semitism, but lower-level officials still show reluctance to "tackle a deeply entrenched problem in society."

The report listed rock-throwing incidents against Russian synagogues, arson attacks against community institutions, a series of attacks by neo-Nazi youths and numerous acts of vandalism against Jewish cemeteries.

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# WORLD REPORT

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Brian Hendler

**FIGHTING OVER THE FENCE**

An Israeli activist is arrested by border police last week in the West Bank village of Bidu during clashes with Israeli forces over construction of Israel's security barrier.

## Ever the maverick, Reform's Yoffie may signal new support for Sharon

By JOE BERKOFISKY

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — As goes Reform movement leader Rabbi Eric Yoffie, so go many American Jews.

At least that's the consensus of many observers after a surprising commentary in which the president of the Union for Reform Judaism — an outspoken liberal — called Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "my hero" for Sharon's plan for an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Yoffie, whose group includes more than 900 congregations believed to represent the majority of affiliated American Jews, wrote in the Forward last week that while he once labeled Sharon a "demagogue," he now considers him a "master politician" singularly situated to end Israel's occupation over the Palestinians and encourage peace.

"You have to give someone credit when they do something right, and the prime minister is doing something I consider to be very

*Continued on page 2*

## ■ *Ever the maverick, Reform's Yoffie may be bellwether of Sharon support*

*Continued from page 1*  
important," Yoffie told JTA.

Appearing in the days after Sharon's historic April 14 summit with President Bush, the front page Op-Ed not only struck a nerve, but also may signal that American Jews are shifting from their former support for the Oslo peace accords to new hope in Sharon, some say.

"It's an important note of realism from the left, and I think it also reflects the rank and file of American Jewry," said Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, president of the Jewish Life Network, who is considered a moderate in the modern Orthodox world.

"It's a real recognition across the conventional lines that Sharon from the right is bringing some hope for disengagement and peace that the left cannot deliver," Greenberg said.

Not all liberal Jews would go as far as Yoffie in lauding Sharon, but they do praise the Israeli leader's political acumen.

Writer and activist Leonard Fein said Sharon has "played this entire thing brilliantly. He put Bush over a barrel: With elections coming up Bush wants a Gaza withdrawal, and Sharon told him, 'You've got to give me something.' Now Sharon has told Israelis that if you vote against withdrawal, you're voting against our alliance with the United States."

But while many U.S. Jewish groups officially have backed Sharon, many U.S. Jews remain skeptical about whether he really will withdraw from Gaza even if he

wins support for the move, Fein said.

"I really don't want to live a life in which I say or think, 'I told you so' " about Sharon, he said. "I would much rather be pleasantly surprised. If there's a pleasant surprise in the offing here, I may not be the first to drink champagne, but I'll be lining up."

More wary is Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a writer and former chairwoman of Americans for Peace Now. Though she, too, acknowledged Sharon's political skills, she called Yoffie's support "misplaced praise."

Bush's support for Sharon's proposal was "chutzpahdik," or nervy, she said, because it is the Palestinians, not the Americans, who must sign off on any peace plan.

Now, "what do the Palestinians bring back to their people to show: Negotiations pay off, violence doesn't?" she asked.

Dr. Mendy Ganchrow, executive vice president of the Religious Zionists of America and a fierce Bush backer, said Yoffie's stance could encourage some of the 80 percent of American Jews who traditionally vote Democratic to vote for Bush on Nov. 2 because of his strong support for Sharon and opposition to Palestinian terrorism.

"When liberals see something outstanding by a conservative, they have to stand up and say, 'Amen,' " Ganchrow said. "What Yoffie is saying you're finding across the board — except for the people who are prepared to fight to the last Jew" to retain all of the biblical Land of Israel.

Indeed, the Op-Ed by a self-described dove appeared just as some on the right — including the Zionist Organization of America and Americans for a Safe Israel — were accusing Sharon of abandoning Jewish settlements and appeasing terrorists while getting nothing in return.

"Eric Yoffie himself called Yasser Arafat and his regime neo-Nazis, so why is it positive to be giving land away to a neo-Nazi?" asked Morton Klein, the Zionist Organization of America's president.

Yoffie cautioned that he wasn't departing from the Reform movement's long-time opposition to Israeli settlements

and support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Moreover, some say, it's not that American Jews suddenly may follow Yoffie's lead, but rather that Sharon is moving closer to what the majority of American and Israeli Jews want.

"There's certainly an irony that now American Jews are supporting Sharon, but it's reflective of the change in the Israeli government's position," said Jonathan Jacoby, director of the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum.

Klein said Sharon has abandoned his right-wing ideals for the left.

"Sharon's policies are no longer Likud policies, they are Labor-Meretz policies," he said, referring to the left-leaning Israeli political parties.

Some say history is being made.

Jack Rosen, president of the American Jewish Congress, said Bush took a "historic step" last week by saying publicly that the presence of West Bank settlements means Israel will not have to return to the pre-1967 boundary lines, and that Palestinian refugees do not have a right to return to their former homes inside Israel.

"What the president has done is codify the two open issues in this process," he said. "What's more important for the future of Israel than these two issues?"

Ganchrow, meanwhile, echoed Yoffie in saying that Sharon is uniquely situated to make a bold move.

"It took Nixon to go to China; it took Begin" — Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin — "to go to Yamit," a Jewish settlement in the Sinai Desert that Israel relinquished in its peace treaty with Egypt.

In the past, Yoffie has shown a similar willingness to change course, such as when he admitted that it had been a mistake to support Oslo and trust Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. Maybe American Jews will now follow his lead in backing Sharon's bold steps, said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of Jewish history at Brandeis University.

"I respect his ability to challenge his own assumptions and preconceptions, and in so doing, to encourage all Jews to do so," Sarna said.

### BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Some say it's Sharon who is moving closer to what most American and Israeli Jews want.

### JTA WORLD REPORT

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# Broad range of Jews go to women's rights march

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — This weekend's march on Washington for reproductive rights, an election-year exercise in mass message-sending, has a substantial Jewish component.

Two major national Jewish women's organizations and three religious denominations are organizing busloads of participants for Sunday's March for Women's Lives on the National Mall in Washington.

Many more Jews are expected to participate with other national organizations, such as Planned Parenthood and the National Organization for Women. Several associated events are geared toward the Jewish community.

The goal is to highlight the religious community's advocacy for abortion rights and send a strong political message in an election year.

"Decisions that are made about who constitutes our federal judiciary will affect our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren to come," said Marsha Atkind, National Council of Jewish Women president. A number of Supreme Court vacancies are expected in the coming years.

"Whoever is elected should know that there are millions upon millions of people in this country that are pro-choice," Atkind said.

Atkind said she believes Jews have a distinctive role to play in this debate.

"As Jewish women, it's particularly important because we know what it is like to lose rights," Atkind said. "These are rights that are in danger of being lost."

Many Jews are concerned about what they see as increasing limitations on a woman's right to choose. They rallied against last year's passage of the Partial Birth Abortion Ban, which outlawed a specific abortion procedure technically known as intact dilation and evacuation, generally carried out late in a pregnancy.

Some Jewish groups also criticized President Bush's signing of the Unborn Victims of Violence Act earlier this month, which made attacks against pregnant women that harm embryos a separate crime. They said granting a fetus legal status contradicted the landmark Roe v. Wade U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding legal abortions.

Orthodox Jews generally differ from other streams when it comes to abortion, and Orthodox representatives in Washington have expressed support for both acts.

Backers of this weekend's march, including officials from the Reform and Conservative Jewish movements, said they had the Jewish majority behind them.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said polls consistently show Jews are more supportive of abortion rights and Roe v. Wade than any other religious or ethnic community in the United States.

"Jews have always been involved in struggles for justice in America," said Saperstein, who expects about 2,500 mem-

bers of the Reform Jewish community to attend the rally. "These issues will weigh very heavily in the hearts and minds of the Jewish community."

Jewish officials are expected to participate in an interfaith service during Sunday's events, in conjunction with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Official events also include a day of lobbying on Capitol Hill on Friday and a 24-hour prayer vigil Saturday.

The Women of Reform Judaism will hold a Havdalah service Saturday evening at the Jefferson Memorial, followed by a reception. Both WRJ and NCJW are holding events

Sunday morning to bring together their participants.

The Reconstructionist movement is holding Shabbat and Havdalah services at a synagogue in a Maryland suburb.

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, anticipates 1,500 participants in matching red and white shirts.

"I think it's important because we are part of the American community and part of the American world," said June Walker, Hadassah's national president. "We have an obligation to express our opinions to our legislators."

About 120 students are expected to participate in the rally through Hillel, as part of Jewish female empowerment weekend at Hillel at the University of Maryland. ■

**'We have an obligation to express our opinions to our legislators.'**

**June Walker**  
Hadassah

## Jay Litvin, 60, helper of Chernobyl children, dies of cancer

By PETER EPHROSS

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jay Litvin, a leader of a group that helped children who became ill from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, has died of cancer at the age of 60.

Litvin, who suffered from non-Hodgkins lymphoma, died April 15 in Israel, where he had lived since 1993.

Beginning in 1990, Litvin worked for Children of Chernobyl, an organization founded by Chabad-Lubavitch to help those harmed by the 1986 nuclear accident in Ukraine.

In addition to about 4,400 people initially killed by the Chernobyl accident, Ukraine's health ministry estimates that one out of every 16 persons among Ukraine's 49 million people is suffering from grave health disorders linked to the disaster.

Aside from his activities on behalf of Children of Chernobyl,

including fund raising, Litvin also worked closely with international groups, including the United Nations, to help sick children in the region.

"He was a talented man who used his talents to help others," said Abi Raichik, a former executive director of Children of Chernobyl.

Litvin was born in Chicago. He became an observant Jew at the age of 37 and was active in local Chabad activity in Wisconsin and Arizona before moving to Israel.

More recently, he wrote articles on such topics as his illness and parenting for the Web site Chabad.org. He also worked in Israel for the Victims of Terror Fund, a Chabad project that works to supplement medical and social services for Israelis directly affected by three and a half years of Palestinian intifada.

Litvin is survived by his wife Sharon and seven children. ■

# Falash Mura face challenges in Israel

By DINA KRAFT

LOD, Israel (JTA) — Handshakes, tears, and kisses of farewell flow over packed boxes, mattresses and bundles of frying pans.

The Albel family, originally from Ethiopia, is moving again.

This time they're moving into a permanent home and out of the Israeli government center for new immigrants where they have lived since arriving in Israel more than two years ago.

"Finally we'll have our own home," says Asram Albel. "It's good here, but we can't stay here forever."

Raised as Christians in a remote Ethiopian village, the Albels came to Israel as part of a wave of Falash Mura seeking to immigrate to the Jewish state.

The Falash Mura are Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors converted to Christianity, often under social pressure, but who have resumed practicing Judaism.

In his hand, Asram Albel clutches the key to the apartment the family has bought in the working-class town of Kiryat Malachi, about an hour's drive south from the absorption center where he, his wife and two daughters have been sharing a one-bedroom apartment.

Though unemployed and still a relative newcomer to the country, Albel — who wears a cell phone tucked into the pocket of his blue jeans — already looks like an Israeli.

It has been a long journey.

Like Albel, most Falash Mura in Israel are unemployed, struggle with learning Hebrew and have relatives still in Ethiopia waiting to emigrate.

It's unlikely that Albel, who is 57, will find work at his age. But vocational training courses are available to him and others in the community in topics ranging from driving to child-care to metal work.

Falash Mura children study in schools together with other Israelis and are quickly learning Hebrew, often acting as translators and links to society for parents who find it more difficult to learn a new language.

The children are offered special tutorials and academic enrichment programs to help them keep up and even excel in the classroom.

Some 20,000 Falash Mura have immigrated to Israel. In February 2003, the



Brian Hendler

Lagas Albel, left, says goodbye to her friends at an absorption center near Tel Aviv.

Israeli government decided in principle to expedite the immigration of the rest of the Falash Mura community — estimated at another 20,000 people — but the decision has yet to be fully implemented.

In recent years, the flow of Falash Mura to Israel has been limited to about 300 per month. Numbers have declined precipitously in the first few months of this year, apparently because fewer can meet new requirements that they prove maternal Jewish lineage.

After leaving their village in the Gondar region of Ethiopia — where they farmed wheat and raised cattle and sheep — the Albels spent two and a half years living near a relief compound awaiting permission to emigrate.

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, or NACOEJ, helps run relief compounds for the Falash Mura in Addis Ababa and Gondar. The group provides food and Jewish education at the compounds, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee provides medical care and nutritional support for children.

The groups do not provide housing for the Falash Mura, most of whom came to the cities from remote villages in hopes of emigrating.

"We suffered there, but thankfully now we are here, in the Land of Israel, where — most importantly — we are allowed to practice our religion, to maintain our

roots," Albel says.

"There is nothing like Israel in all the world," he says, then pauses. "But it's true: It's hard here."

Most Ethiopian-born Jews in Israel are not Falash Mura — and they haven't always made things easy for the newcomers.

When it comes to the Falash Mura, attitudes are mixed among the Ethiopian Jews who immigrated to Israel in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Despite bonds of language and nationality, old resentments run deep. Ethiopian Israelis speak of the bitter treatment they sometimes received at the hands of Christians, including some Falash Mura, when they lived in Ethiopia.

The two communities lived in different villages in Ethiopia and did not mix, immigrants here say. In Israel, too, they live fairly separate lives, praying in different synagogues and socializing separately.

There is much overlap in the realm of immigrant services, however.

The absorption center in Lod, which is run by the Jewish Agency for Israel, is a typical example: Veteran Israeli Ethiopians help their Falash Mura counterparts by working as social workers, translators and teachers.

"Today we have people who know the language and can help them acclimatize," says the center's director, Chana Dobkin, comparing the current wave of immigrants to the initial groups of Ethiopian

Jews that came over in large numbers in Operations Moses and Solomon.

"We want them to come to Israel and become part of us," says Yosef Hadane, the Ethiopian community's chief rabbi, who is helping to verify which of the Falash Mura waiting to immigrate have Jewish roots.

Speaking privately, some veteran Ethiopian immigrants — and some Israeli government officials — question the Falash Mura's motivation in returning to Judaism. Are they genuinely returning to their faith, or do they simply see Israel as a way to escape famine and poverty in Ethiopia?

Journalist Danny Abebe is one of the few outspoken Ethiopian voices in Israel to publicly criticize the Falash Mura immigration. Abebe blames U.S. Jewish groups like NACOEJ for forcing the issue on Israel.

"The Falash Mura is the project of American Jews," he says.

"It's a very sad story for Ethiopian Jews, because we said for 2,000 years that we are really Jewish," he says, drawing a contrast with the Falash Mura's conversions to Christianity. "I hope they understand that Ethiopian Jews and Falash Mura are not really the same."

Though it took several years, the Falash Mura now are accepted as Jews by Israel's chief rabbinate, as well as by all three major Jewish religious denominations in North America.

Avraham Neguise, director of South Wing to Zion, a pro-Falash Mura organization, dismisses Abebe as a rabble rouser who plays into the hands of Israeli government officials who, Neguise says, want to limit the number of Falash Mura allowed to immigrate.

"The culture is not different: There is one Ethiopian Jewish culture," Neguise says. "People always look for ways to divide and conquer — that is what the Ministries of Absorption and the Interior are trying to do in order to legitimize their discrimination policy, but it won't work because it is one community."

Some Falash Mura advocates say they wonder why the Jewish state readily accepts non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union who have Jewish relatives, but drags its feet when it comes to letting in the Falash Mura.

Israeli government officials reject suggestions that race affects decisions on the Falash Mura. "Any allegations or insinuations regarding racism are unfounded,"

Absorption Ministry spokesman Arik Puder says.

Some say the problem with the Falash Mura is that the cost of absorbing them is unusually high — up to \$100,000 per person, according to some estimates.

For those already in Israel, money is only part of the problem.

Albel says he finds learning Hebrew especially difficult. The family also is taking courses in Judaism, as Falash Mura must do before being officially converted to Judaism under the country's rabbinate.

For now, Albel is focused on the future: the new apartment, his two daughters — Miri, 12, and Tali, 14 — and adjusting to Israeli life.

Albel's wife Lagas, 40, is a slight woman. Standing in her empty apartment in the absorption center, she appears more nervous about leaving than her husband.

"I'm used to it here. Here there is a staff that can speak Amharic," she says, referring to her native Ethiopian tongue.

"It will be hard to get along," she adds, her eyes widening.

She is surrounded by neighbors who have come to help pack and move the family's last belongings out of the apartment.

The Albels came to Israel with virtually nothing. Now, everything in their small absorption center apartment — all provided by the government — is moving with them: metal bed frames and mattresses, a narrow coffee table, a refrigerator.

To make it easier for Ethiopians to own their own homes, the Israeli government has instituted generous mortgage packages for many Ethiopian families. For example, if an apartment costs about \$80,000, 90 percent is paid for by the government, and the remaining 10 percent can be paid in installments over a 25-year period.

The sun pours through the window of the Albel's now-empty eighth-floor apartment, triggering talk of a different sort of emptiness — the void left by those still in Ethiopia, including Lagas Albel's parents and four siblings.

After living for a year in Gondar near the relief compound, they have returned to their home village, Albel reports. But "they still want to come here," she says.

In Kiryat Malachi, Albel will be living near a sister. She has two other sisters and a brother living elsewhere in Israel.

Leaving the absorption center, the family makes its way past the lobby where children watch a Spanish soap opera with Hebrew subtitles. Older Ethiopians, cloaked in traditional white cloth shawls, stand around talking.

They family heads outside, where friends help them load their belongings onto a moving van. Tamar Bassan, the center's social worker, hands Asram Albel an envelope containing a letter with the details of

the family's history in Israel. It will be useful for any future social worker that might work with the family.

Bassan fears that because of economic strain at the Kiryat Malachi municipality, the Albels might fall between the cracks of the city's social services network. "I feel in a way like my children are leaving," she says. "I worked with them for over two years, very closely, and I want to know they will be received well on the other side."

The Albels finally say their last good-byes and set out for their new home. They drive past green fields, the minarets of Arab towns, grazing sheep and Israeli flags flapping in the wind over car dealerships.

In Kiryat Malachi, streets lined with palm trees are choked with rush-hour traffic. The van pulls up in front of the block of low-income apartments. The Albel's flat is a fourth-floor, two-bedroom walk-up.

Inside, Asram Albel takes a quick tour of the apartment. He jiggles the handle of the toilet and it promptly falls into the toilet bowl. He eyes the shoddy application of a new coat of paint.

But the kitchen cabinets and fixtures seem to be new, and there are windows in each of the two bedrooms.

Miri surveys the bedroom she will share with her older sister, pulls out her favorite possessions and arranges them on shelves. The last thing she pulls out is a small music box, which she wipes off and carefully places on a wobbly shelf.

She then moves to the window and throws it open, looking out at another apartment building and a thin patch of grass. A group of Orthodox children walk by and Miri wonders aloud if all her neighbors are Orthodox.

She shouts to Tali on the sidewalk below and smiles. "It's good. I'm excited. I'm scared," she says, then returns to arranging her trinkets.

**In private, some Ethiopian Israelis question the Falash Mura's motives for aliyah.**



# New UJC leader stresses cooperation

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Some people might find it jarring to leave an established and respectable position in middle America for a national post in New York City.

Not Howard Rieger.

The president of the United Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh is slated to end his 24-year tenure this summer and jump to the Big Apple.

An internal search committee of the United Jewish Communities — the coordinating body of the North American Jewish Federation system — recommended Rieger for the post, pending the approval of the organization's board.

Rieger's outlook matches his path: simple, steady and open to new challenges.

After many years in Pittsburgh and, before that, with the Cleveland federation, Rieger, 61, decided there was something appealing about "sprinting to the finishing line" of his career as UJC president.

Given Rieger's history, the analogy is apt. When he was about to turn 30, Rieger wanted to mark the milestone with a new accomplishment: He chose running, and today runs three to five miles a day.

Before turning 60, he wanted to tackle his greatest fear — water.

Under the tutelage of an 83-year-old coach, Rieger now can swim up to a mile.

"It's one of the great accomplishments in my life," he says.

He carries that resolve into the workplace.

Rieger's management style has roots in his beginnings.

He grew up in a lower-middle class neighborhood a few miles from Chicago's Wrigley Field. The family of four lived in an apartment with as many rooms.

Rieger's father, a watchmaker, occasionally had been mocked by his siblings for taking what they considered a menial job — but that hustle brought him to America, while his siblings, who remained in Europe, perished in the Holocaust.

His father's experience imbued Rieger with a salt-of-the-earth approach to life.

Asked to describe his management style, he says, "Try to remember who you are and where you came from."

"I don't think one should get carried away with position and title," he says. "Whatever influence or authority or im-

pact you can have comes with the job."

That outlook contributes to Rieger's rapport with federation lay leaders, a relationship that many professionals in the Jewish world find hard to navigate.

Several say one of Rieger's key attributes is humility, which makes it easy for him to share credit with others.

Rieger has a "very good sense of what the correct relationship between professionals and lay leaders is," says Steven Klinghoffer, who headed the UJC's politically charged Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution committee.

"One of the great failures in the ONAD process" was that professionals "were the ones making key decisions, and lay leaders, for a variety of reasons, were left out," says Klinghoffer, a lay leader from New Jersey's Metrowest federation.

Rieger says that lay leaders aren't meant to be "window dressing" in federation decisions.

With both lay leaders and employees, his management strategy revolves around empowerment, openness and rewards for good work, Rieger says.

"I love to give people the authority and respect to go do their thing and take their risks," he says. "If they make a mistake: You know what, I've made a few mistakes in my life."

But, he is quick to add, people who make too many mistakes "won't be in an organization I work with."

As for openness, "We live in a world now where you can get 90 percent of what you need to know out there anyway," Rieger says. "Why act as though there's anything that's incapable of seeing the light of day?"

That resonates with some who say the federation system has cultivated a culture of secrecy.

Rieger "leads by example," says David Sarnat, an old college friend of Rieger who now is the Jewish Agency for Israel's North American director.

When he was an employee at the Cleveland federation, Sarnat encouraged Rieger to apply for a position. He got the

job, and spent the first 11 years of his federation career there.

The length of time Rieger has spent in his previous positions is notable in the field. The lengthy tenures have helped drive his success, giving him the "ability to influence others and get the kind of respect that you need to be able to survive," he says.

Ironically, both of Rieger's children work at the UJC's Manhattan offices.

Rieger says he's proud that he and his wife "have kids who care as much about this as we do." But he adds

that he "never wants to see a personnel file."

In spite of the challenges facing the UJC, Sarnat says Rieger may have it easier than his two predecessors, who had to weather the bulk of UJC's growing pains after it was formed in 1999 from a merger of the United Jewish Appeal, Council of Jewish Federations and United Israel Appeal.

"Maybe Howard now comes in at a time when there's greater receptivity to working collectively," Sarnat says.

## U.S. tops list of Nazi-hunters

NEW YORK (JTA) — The United States topped a list of nations prosecuting suspected Nazis.

In its annual report on the search for Nazis, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles said the United States and its Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations, ranked first in targeting alleged Nazis between April 1, 2003 and March 31 of this year.

Canada and Germany were grouped together next, while Austria, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland were in the next category.

Those who refused to pursue suspected Nazis included Colombia, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Venezuela.

During the past year, 166 legal actions worldwide sparked six convictions, all in the United States.

Howard Rieger says he loves to 'give people the authority and respect to do their thing.'

## FIRST PERSON

## Fighting the fear of shaving cream on Independence Day

By BRIAN BLUM

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — When did Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, get so violent?

I'm not talking about the heightened security alerts aimed at stopping suicide bombers, which have become even more prevalent in recent weeks. No, the violence I'm talking about is a matter of shaving cream.

Shaving cream in the hands of babes, that is. Yes, this is the new tradition of Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel.

In our neighborhood, ground zero is the local school playground. Unfortunately, that's also where our synagogue traditionally has held its annual Independence Day prayer service. We've gone in years past and all three of our kids got sprayed. I swore I would not return.

But a half hour or so into my grandstand at home last year, I called down to my 12-year-old, Amir, and told him I was having second thoughts. Maybe it will be better this time, I suggested.

■

The scene was familiar from the year before: Dozens of vendors were set up outside selling spray cans. We entered the schoolyard. So far so good. But before we knew it, the basketball court was covered in white. I saw Amir take a hit.

His first reaction was rage, then anguish. He turned and ran to the gate, past the vendors hawking the tools of his defeat, across the street and eventually up the stairs to our apartment.

He stripped down to his underwear to free himself of even the slightest hint of the battle. Then we smiled and laughed out loud at the absurdity of it all. A holiday commemorating what it means to be free had imprisoned us in our home.

We resolved to get back into the fray and show our neighbors, our fellow countrymen, what stuff we were made of. Yes, that's exactly what we would do — this year.

■

Brian Blum writes the syndicated column "This Normal Life," available at [www.ThisNormalLife.com](http://www.ThisNormalLife.com).

## Powell's presence could give weight to anti-Semitism meet

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's presence at an upcoming conference on anti-Semitism is expected to bring more attention to a growing international problem.

Jewish leaders believe Powell's addition to the U.S. delegation to the Berlin conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on April 28-29 will cause European nations to ratchet up their own participation. Leaders believe there will be more foreign ministers in attendance, and more international media attention.

"Everyone hopes that all the other countries will send someone of his stature to represent them," said Ed Koch, the former New York City mayor who will lead the U.S. delegation. "We are very grateful."

Jewish groups also are gratified that a coalition of civil rights leaders — including black, Latino and women's rights officials — will travel to Berlin as a sign of solidarity and to educate European leaders on tools and methods for combating discrimination.

Relations between black and Jewish leaders have been strained since the 2001 U.N. Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. Jewish leaders sought to limit the U.S. presence there because of the threat of anti-Israel actions.

But Julie Fernandez, senior policy analyst and special counsel for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, said civil rights groups saw international anti-Semitism firsthand in Durban, and wanted to show that combating anti-Semitism is part of the civil rights agenda.

"This is an opportunity for the civil rights community to speak out against something that has been part of our agenda all along," she said, noting that Jewish groups have been part of her organization since its inception.

Powell is expected to address the conference and meet with other leaders of the diplomatic "Quartet" — the United States, European Union, United Nations and

Russia — that crafted the "road map" for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The anti-Semitism conference is drawing a broad range of American officials. In addition to the 13-member official delegation, several American Jewish leaders who attended the OSCE's first anti-Semitism conference in Vienna last year have been appointed as "public advisers" this year, after an outcry when they were left off the list.

Participants are hoping European countries will enact anti-bias legislation and create law enforcement training mechanisms.

They also are seeking better record-keeping of anti-Semitic crimes.

Betty Ehrenberg, director of international and communal affairs for the Orthodox Union and a member of the U.S. delegation, said she thinks European countries, seeking favor from the United States, would be more likely to embrace these reforms because of Powell's presence.

"I think it shows the world that the United States is really serious about how anti-Semitism is dealt with and that we're not merely paying lip service to this issue," she said. "Countries will feel much more obligated to take some concrete steps."

Some in the Jewish community had been concerned that the composition of the delegation and its leadership was not sufficiently high-level and would send a signal that the administration wasn't interested in the issue.

While the U.S. delegation was led by a former New York City mayor, the German delegation was to be led by Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, and German President Johannes Rau was slated to give the opening address.

Others were angered that the White House didn't include many of the Jewish leaders who had attended the first Vienna conference and had been working on the issue at home.

The Bush administration said it wanted to rotate its appointments.

The U.S. is not 'merely paying lip service to this issue.'

Betty Ehrenberg  
Orthodox Union

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Mistaken identity in Iraq killing

A gunman in Iraq killed a South African security guard whom he thought was Jewish.

Thursday's murder occurred in a store in Baghdad. After the murder, the gunman, who wore a kaffiyeh, "tried to smash the car and then turned and said, 'I killed the Jew inside; you burn his car,' " a witness said.

### Sharon's poll position

A survey showed Likud support declining for Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

According to the opinion poll published in Yediot Achronot on Thursday, 44 percent of Likud members back the disengagement plan, while 40 percent are opposed; 16 percent are undecided.

The Israeli prime minister will put the plan to a May 2 referendum by his ruling party's 200,000 members, and approval is crucial for its implementation.

### Israeli unemployment rises

Israel's jobless rate hit 11 percent in February, the highest level since 1994. The number of unemployed reached 289,800 people, up 2,600 in a single month, Israel's Globes newspaper reported.

The unemployment rate has risen by 2.3 percent, or 60,603 people, since the start of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000.

### Israel joins U.S. in cyber crackdown

Israel is one of 11 nations joining a U.S.-led intellectual property enforcement initiative.

As part of "Operation Fastlink," law enforcement officials in the United States, Israel, Singapore and nine European nations staged more than 100 surprise raids over a 24-hour period Wednesday and Thursday to crackdown on online theft of software.

### Safer skies for El Al

El Al is equipping some of its planes with anti-missile systems. Israel's Transportation Ministry said Thursday that the first El Al plane rigged with such a system would come off the production line in June.

Israeli defense industries began developing the systems for use on the national carrier after a charter flight was almost shot down by an Al-Qaida missile in Kenya in 2002.

### Former Israeli minister smuggling ecstasy?

A former Israeli Cabinet minister was jailed for seven days on suspicion that he tried to smuggle 25,000 Ecstasy pills into Israel.

Gonen Segev was alleged Thursday to have smuggled the pills from the Netherlands. Segev served as a minister from the right-wing Tsomet Party in Yitzhak Rabin's government in the mid-1990s.

### Candle-soot 'miracle'

Sephardi faithful are flocking to see the "miraculous" likeness of a Moroccan sage on the wall of an Israeli home.

A fervently Orthodox family in the northern village of Rehassim invited reporters to see the stain left by the soot of Sabbath candles, claiming it formed the outline of a famous portrait of the late Baba Sali.

"This is a miracle, a sign that people should repent," one visibly moved visitor told Israeli television Thursday.

The family, which did not give its name, said so many pilgrims had found their way to its home that they were now being admitted in shifts.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Fla. synagogues win ruling

Two small Orthodox congregations in Florida won a ruling that allows them to hold services above a bank.

A U.S. appeals court ruled Wednesday that moving services for congregants at Midrash Sephardi and Young Israel of Bal Harbor, both in Surfside, Fla., would discriminate against religious institutions and burden elderly and ill members. The decision was based on the 2000 Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act.

"The Orthodox Jewish community is deeply gratified, as all Americans who cherish religious freedom should be, that the appeals court has rejected the use of zoning regulations as a tool of religious discrimination," the Orthodox Union said in a statement.

### Ginsburg remembers Holocaust

Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined lawmakers and survivors in commemorating the Holocaust.

"In our struggle for a better world, our memories are among our most powerful resources," the Jewish U.S. Supreme Court justice said Thursday, before six candles were lit by lawmakers and Holocaust survivors in the Capitol Rotunda. The remembrance paid special tribute to the 60th anniversary of the deportation of Hungarian Jews.

### Brooklynites rally for Gaza bloc

Demonstrators rallied in Brooklyn in favor of a Gaza Strip settlement bloc slated for evacuation.

Some 2,000 people attended Wednesday's rally for Gush Katif, held outside Chabad-Lubavitch headquarters, organizers said.

All of Israel's Gaza settlements are slated for removal under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan.

### Mending fences with neighbors

A young Jewish philanthropist is funding a writing contest to bolster Christian-Jewish relations.

In the wake of debate surrounding Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," Elizabeth Goldhirsh, 25, is soliciting essays from youths aged 16 to 22 on the shared history and values of Judaism and Christianity, the Forward reported.

The first-place winner of "Reaching Common Ground" will receive \$25,000, and 26 others will win anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

## WORLD

### Austria pressed on Nazi cases

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Austria to investigate cases of suspected Nazi-era war criminals.

On Thursday, the group submitted a list of 121 names to Austria. Center director Efraim Zuroff said the center had focused on Austria due to the past reticence of Austrian authorities to prosecute war crimes cases.

### Blair backs Israeli nukes

Tony Blair defended Israel's right to a nuclear arsenal.

The British prime minister was asked in Parliament on Wednesday whether Britain should press for a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction.

"What is important is that we recognize that in order to achieve that, Israel is going to have to be sure that it is surrounded by countries that do not wish it ill," Blair answered.

Israel has neither confirmed nor denied its assumed nuclear arsenal.