

## IN THE NEWS

## Rice confirmed for State Department

Condoleezza Rice, who has pledged to work diligently on Israeli-Palestinian issues, was confirmed as secretary of state.

President Bush's national security adviser, in his first term, Rice served as an envoy on Israeli-Palestinian issues in 2003.

Rice faced several hours of critical debate in the Senate, focused predominantly on her support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Three Jewish senators voted against her confirmation: Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.).

## Sharon-Abbas summit a possibility next month

Ariel Sharon may meet Mahmoud Abbas next month, officials said.

Aides to the two leaders met Wednesday in Jerusalem after the Israeli prime minister lifted a ban on diplomatic contacts with the Palestinian Authority that were imposed after a recent terrorist attack.

According to political sources, the aides agreed to convene again next week with a view to setting up a summit, the first since Abbas succeeded Yasser Arafat as P.A. president.

The summit, expected next month, could boost efforts to get the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan back on track.

## Columbia University conference postponed

A Columbia University conference on the Middle East, which Israel's ambassador refused to attend, is being postponed.

The Second Annual Forum on International Conflict Resolution: Revisiting the Middle East Peace Process, scheduled for Thursday, was postponed after Israel's U.S. ambassador, Danny Ayalon, canceled his appearance due to controversy surrounding charges of faculty intimidation toward pro-Israel students at Columbia. [Story, Pg. 3]

# WORLD REPORT

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## Conservative rabbis rebuke but don't expel rabbi of gay shul

By CHANAN TIGAY

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — When the Conservative movement's rabbinic arm decided to censure the young associate rabbi of a gay and lesbian synagogue this week, it quietly resolved a public dispute that had caused anger, pain and confusion in the movement.

Although the Rabbinical Assembly rebuked Rabbi Ayelet Cohen on Wednesday for violating one of its strictly enforced placement rules, it did not move to expel her, which had been one of the options.

The movement actually has expelled others for placement violations, but Cohen's story had grabbed headlines in both Jewish and mainstream newspapers because of her vocal support for gay rights in Judaism and the fact that she had performed several same-sex marriages.

"It was very natural" that the issue of the movement's struggle with gay and lesbian positions would be raised, "because Rabbi Cohen was working at Beth Simchat Torah," Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly, said, referring to the Manhattan synagogue where she works.

Movement insiders say the sort of rule Cohen broke is the most frequent cause for expulsion from the assembly, and its violation rarely garners the kind of media attention Cohen's case did.

"Nobody contacted the Rabbinical Assembly in the fall when we also had to expel a member," said Rabbi Moshe Edelman, director of Leadership Development and of the Committee on Congregational Standards for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

Repeated attempts to reach Cohen this week proved unsuccessful.

Rabbinical Assembly members are required to obtain a waiver from the organization before accepting postings at synagogues not affiliated with the United Synagogue, the Conservative movement's synagogue branch.

Cohen, assembly officials say, took her job at Congregation Beth Simchat Torah before receiving such a waiver, and though she was granted one retroactively she allowed it to expire.

During a meeting Wednesday with the assembly's executive council, Cohen, 30, apologized for violating the waiver procedure and also apologized that material regarding the case had been leaked to the media, Meyers said.

Council members decided against expelling her from the organization and granted her permission to stay on at Beth Simchat Torah for an indefinite period.

Meyers said it was a "most natural assumption for people to make" that there was a connection with the gay and lesbian issue, which the Conservative movement is now struggling with.

"It would be difficult for people to understand that it was an issue about" disregarding a technical rule, he said.

In the lead-up to Wednesday's decision, Cohen and Meyers exchanged charges and countercharges in the media.

Cohen, who is heterosexual, said she was being targeted because of her controversial views on same-sex marriage. Meyers said this was untrue.

Indeed, the assembly said it is aware of at least 20 Conservative rabbis who have

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## ■ Conservative rabbi at gay shul gets her waiver

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performed such ceremonies without consequence from the assembly.

"It's because I have performed same-sex wedding ceremonies," Cohen said on Jan. 14 in *The New York Times*.

In 1992, the Rabbinical Assembly voted against ordaining gay rabbis and officiating at same-sex weddings.

The assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards is planning to re-examine the movement's approach to homosexuality in April, and members will be submitting papers on the issues in advance of those discussions.

The prevailing practice in the Conservative movement as far as already-ordained rabbis go has been described as "don't ask, don't tell."

Declared gays and lesbians are officially barred from the Conservative movement's two main rabbinical seminaries, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

The assembly has no mechanism for expelling rabbis who are discovered to be gay, although the group has in the past informed congregations considering hiring a gay rabbi of that person's sexual orientation, and in one case did not allow a gay rabbi to use its rabbinic placement services, said movement leaders.

The placement rules prevent synagogues from plucking talented rabbis from

other shuls and those familiar with the assembly say those rules are assiduously enforced.

But Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky of Congregation Anshe Chesed on Manhattan's Upper West Side said that Cohen's post at Beth Simchat Torah was not one that many other Conservative rabbis had chased after.

"She didn't cheat anybody out of this job," he said.

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, a professor at the University of Judaism, noted that for the Rabbinical Assembly, violating placement procedures is "the no-no."

"To the extent that there are expulsions,

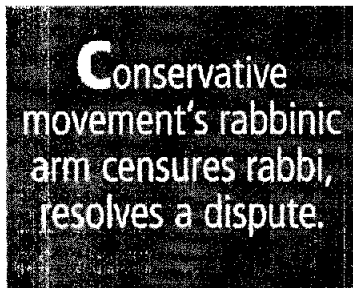
it's usually related to placement procedures," he said.

The Rabbinical Assembly also has expelled members for performing intermarriages as well as other violations of its rules and procedures.

Dorff said that when the assembly again debates issues relating to gays and the rabbinate, it will look at the issue "on the basis of its own merits," with the Cohen case not likely to affect the discourse.

He and others suggest that the Conservative movement's position on gay rabbis is bound to change at some point. "It's a question of when, not if," he said.

"I think it's largely a generational issue," Dorff added. "It hopefully will happen this time around. If not, it will happen within 10 years." ■



## Jewish actor, director get Oscar nods

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — An Israeli-born actress who studied at Hebrew University and a British director who spent time in a Zionist youth movement headed this year's list of Jewish Oscar nominees.

In addition to Natalie Portman and Mike Leigh, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman also received a nod.

And a short documentary about Sister Rose Thering, a Roman Catholic nun who has devoted her life to fighting anti-Semitism, won a nomination as well.

The diminutive Portman, born in Jerusalem and the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, was nominated for best supporting actress for her role in "Closer," a look at love and betrayal in contemporary London.

Discovered at the age of 11, she made her Broadway debut in the title role of "The Diary of Anne Frank," and shot to movie fame as Queen Amidala in "Star Wars: Episode One — The Phantom Menace."

When asked in an interview to name her favorite country, Portman opted for Israel — her father, a physician, is Israeli.

Portman earlier won Golden Globes top honors in her category, crediting "Closer" director Mike Nichols for her winning performance in an emotional acceptance speech.

Leigh, best known for his penetrating working-class dramas, was nominated

for directing "Vera Drake," focusing on a warmhearted back-street abortionist.

He was a longtime member of Habonim, a labor Zionist youth movement, and has spoken fondly of his time there.

Kaufman was nominated in the best original screenplay category for the romantic comedy "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." His most notable also credits include "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation."

"Sister Rose's Passion," a short film by Oren Jacoby and Steve Kalafer, is about the life and work of the nun, a professor emerita at New Jersey's Seton Hall University, where she helped establish the school's graduate department of Jewish-Christian studies. Thering, who has gone to Israel more than 30 times, is a strong and vocal supporter of the Jewish state.

Germany's "Downfall," dramatizing the last 10 days of Hitler's life in a Berlin bunker, was one of five finalists for best foreign-language film. Neither Israel's "Campfire" nor the Palestinian "The Olive Harvest" made the cut.

One of last year's most controversial pictures, Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," struck out in the major categories, but is in contention for original score, cinematography and makeup.

Veteran director Sidney Lumet will receive an honorary Academy Award for his life work at the Feb. 27 Oscar fete in Hollywood's Kodak Theater. ■

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# Barenboim talk sparks anger

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's not often that someone compares the anti-Semitic German composer Richard Wagner to Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism.

But at Columbia University on Monday — the day the United Nations marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz — the Argentine-Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim reportedly did just that.

Barenboim, who sparked outrage several years ago by performing Wagner's music in Israel, where it was taboo to play the work of Hitler's favorite composer, excoriated the Jewish state at a memorial lecture for his late friend Edward Said, the Columbia professor who was a member of the Palestine National Council.

According to news reports and comments from audience members, Barenboim compared Herzl's ideas to Wagner's; criticized Palestinian terrorist attacks but also justified them; and said Israeli actions contributed to the rise of international anti-Semitism.

The lecture is emblematic of an escalating crisis embroiling Columbia, where faculty members in the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures departments have been accused of intimidation by pro-Israel students.

In October 2004, the David Project, a pro-Israel advocacy group, screened a documentary called "Columbia Unbecoming," airing claims that faculty members harass students who don't share their anti-Israel views.

Two months later, Columbia University president Lee Bollinger announced the formation of an investigative committee, which is due to issue a report by the end of February.

Pro-Israel students had complained of faculty intimidation before. In 2003, Bollinger responded by appointing another committee to assess the matter. That group found no evidence of bias.

This time around, some are taking issue with the five committee members chosen. Among them are faculty members who signed petitions urging Columbia to divest its holdings in companies that do business with Israel, as well as the former adviser of one of the faculty members accused of intimidation.

Meanwhile, Columbia's campus news-

paper reported Wednesday on the second instance of anti-Semitic vandalism in recent months: A swastika and racial slurs were scrawled in a men's bathroom at the student union Monday.

In light of the ongoing concern among Jewish students on campus, Daniel Ayalon, Israel's U.S. ambassador, canceled plans to attend a Columbia conference on the Middle East peace process scheduled for Thursday, according to Israel's consul general in New York, Arye Mekel.

Former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell, who coordinated the conference, said he would reschedule the event for September. In an e-mail to JTA, Mitchell explained that several expected guests, including Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, had faced travel difficulties that made the conference inconvenient.

Many Jewish students on campus say they're distressed by the latest developments.

"I'm feeling really worn out by the whole thing," sophomore Bari Weiss said. At the same time, she said, "the active Jewish students are committed to being really unrelenting about this whole thing."

Weiss, who will represent herself and other students before the university committee, is working with Columbians for Academic Freedom. According to its Web site, the group is compiling student grievances to "put a stop to the abuse of professional power in the pursuit of political ends."

Weiss just finished a course with Joseph Massad, one of the professors accused of intimidation in "Columbia Unbecoming."

Weiss said Massad had claimed that Zionism destroyed Jewish culture, said Israeli schoolchildren killed in a terrorist attack were casualties of "cross-fire," and made sarcastic comments about the ongoing investigation into his conduct that silenced critical stu-

dents. Massad could not be reached for comment.

"I feel scared because I don't trust the committee," Weiss said — but added, "We don't really have a choice at this point."

Bollinger, the university president, attended the Barenboim lecture, applauded and failed to criticize his statements, according to several audience

**'I have never encountered such intellectual dishonesty. Anybody who tries to frame it as academic freedom is out of their mind.'**

**Shira Dicker**  
Publicist

members.

Bollinger asked Barenboim "what alternative perspectives must be entertained in order to bring about the resolution we all desperately want" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, according to Susan Brown, a university spokeswoman.

"As a university it is our responsibility to discuss the most controversial and intractable issues of our day, and Columbia must be resolute in its tolerance for those who express unconventional, unpopular and sometimes even offensive views, with which we don't necessarily agree, in the course of public debate," Brown said.

Publicist Shira Dicker and her husband, Ari Goldman, dean of students at Columbia's School of Journalism, were outraged by the lecture.

"I have never encountered such intellectual dishonesty," said Dicker, who wrote a letter of protest to Bollinger after the lecture.

"Anybody who tries to frame" the debate "as academic freedom is out of their mind," she said. "It's bullying."

Goldman said he was booed when he asked a critical question of Barenboim. He left before Barenboim played the piano following his speech.

Barenboim's comments were "very disturbing, especially in the charged atmosphere at Columbia now over Israel," Goldman said. "I know he's a great musician, but when he started to play, I left. I couldn't listen to music from someone who had such scary things to say about Jews."

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## WORLD

### Cheney honors Auschwitz liberation

Vice President Dick Cheney told Holocaust survivors that their children and grandchildren are the "greatest victory of all."

Speaking Wednesday at a reception in Krakow, Poland, for survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp, Cheney reflected on the need for education to preserve the legacy of the Holocaust.

"Men without conscience are capable of any cruelty the human mind can imagine," Cheney said. "Therefore we must teach every generation the values of tolerance and decency and moral courage."

Cheney also said free nations must spread freedom, a reference to President Bush's call for a U.S. role in spreading democracy across the world.

Cheney will participate Thursday in events marking the 60th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation.

### ADL petitions Vatican

The Anti-Defamation League wants the Vatican to release its Holocaust-era baptismal records.

The ADL is gathering signatures on a letter asking the Vatican to disclose its records.

The move was in reaction to the discovery of a Vatican letter to French authorities asking them not to return Jewish children hidden during the war to their parents or Jewish communities.

"There may be many Jewish children who were rescued and baptized who, to this day, are not aware of their true origins," the ADL wrote. "The Vatican has an obligation to allow these fortunate survivors of the Holocaust a complete understanding of their heritage and history."

## NORTH AMERICA

### Bush: Abbas 'courageous'

Mahmoud Abbas is showing courage and leadership, President Bush said.

Bush praised the new Palestinian Authority president Wednesday in remarks at the National Institutes of Health that were meant to be focused on health care.

"I am very pleased by the courage and leadership shown by Abu Mazen," Bush said, using Abbas' nickname, "his desire to unify security forces within the Palestinian territory, so as to defeat the terrorists there and allow for democracy to advance. I believe a Palestinian democracy will emerge and will grow, enabling us to achieve a goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace."

### Group wants Canadian passport policy reviewed

B'nai Brith Canada wants Canadians born in Jerusalem to have Israel listed in their passports.

According to B'nai Brith senior legal counsel David Matas, refusing to list Jerusalem as being in Israel is discriminatory.

He filed the application on behalf of a 17-year-old Toronto resident, but said many others also have queried the organization.

### Deer mauls Holocaust survivor

A Holocaust survivor and sculptor was hurt Monday night when a 10-point buck smashed through a window in his Columbus, Ohio, home.

Alfred Tibor, 84, was wounded on his wrist and stomach and bled badly after the deer mauled him Monday.

His wife flagged down a passing motorist for help while Tibor fended off the animal rampaging inside his home.

Columbus police shot and killed the deer.

Tibor's wife said he likely will be released from the hospital on Thursday.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Israel, U.S., Palestinians to coordinate

Israel, the United States and the Palestinian Authority will set up a mechanism to smooth over "differences" and "difficulties" in peace talks.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom outlined the plan for reporters after meeting Wednesday with Condoleezza Rice, shortly before her confirmation as U.S. secretary of state.

Shalom said there was "no doubt" that Mahmoud Abbas, the new Palestinian Authority president, had made progress in containing terrorist attacks, but said more remained to be done.

Shalom said details of the coordinating mechanism have yet to be worked out, but that it would address differences in negotiations and how to proceed after terrorist attacks.

### Israel: Agency won't sanction Iran

Israel's understanding is that the next meeting of the U.N. nuclear watchdog will not refer Iran to the Security Council for sanctions.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is due to meet in mid-February to consider alleged Iranian violations of its membership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Israel says the current status — which allows Iran to suspend but not end efforts to enrich uranium — will allow the Islamic theocracy to gain the knowledge needed to manufacture a nuclear device within a year.

Israel believes Iran is violating the agreement, but Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said Wednesday in Washington that he doesn't believe the IAEA will refer Iran to the Security Council for sanctions at this meeting.

The next IAEA meeting is in June.

### U.S. wants Syria to back peace

The United States encouraged Syria to support Israeli-Palestinian peace.

William Burns, the top State Department envoy to the Middle East, said the United States had asked the Syrians in recent talks to "to support this moment of opportunity before Palestinians and Israelis."

On Wednesday, Burns was in Cairo on a tour of the region to help bring Israelis and Palestinians together.

### West Bank terrorist killed

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian terrorist in the West Bank.

The Al-Aksa Brigade leader was shot while fleeing an ambush by undercover commandos on a car carrying him and other gunmen Wednesday in Kalkilya.

In Gaza, Palestinians said shots fired by Israeli troops at the town of Deir Al-Balah killed a Palestinian girl in her home.

Israeli security sources disputed the account, saying the girl was hit by shrapnel from a Palestinian rocket that misfired.

### Gaza settlers up in arms

Israeli settlers and police scuffled in the Gaza Strip over the deployment of Palestinian Authority security forces.

Two settlers were hurt and five detained in Wednesday's confrontation at Neveh Dekalim, which took place as Israeli officials were meeting their P.A. counterparts to agree on ways of stopping Palestinian rocket and mortar attacks on Israel.

Under the agreement, the Palestinian Authority is to deploy 2,000 police in southern Gaza, the site of arms smuggling from adjoining Egypt.

The Neveh Dekalim scuffles forced Israeli and Palestinian officers to reconvene at a fortified installation in the nearby Gush Katif junction.