

IN THE NEWS

U.S. to pay millions to settle 'Gold Train'

The U.S. government agreed to pay \$25.5 million to Hungarian Holocaust survivors whose property was looted by the American military.

The settlement was reached March 10, and includes \$25 million to cover basic humanitarian services for the survivors, as well as \$500,000 for creation of a historical archive.

None of the plaintiffs will receive individual restitution money.

The settlement requires approval by a Florida federal judge, and objections may still be heard.

U.S. to offer incentives to Iran

The United States said it would offer Iran economic incentives to abandon its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said last Friday that the United States would lift its objections to Iran's application to join the World Trade Organization and its licensing of spare parts for commercial aircraft if the Islamic republic ends its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

The Bush administration until now has refused to offer economic incentives to Iran.

Sharon vows to dismantle outposts

Israel vowed to crack down on illegal West Bank settler outposts.

"Evacuating the unauthorized outposts is part of Israel's commitments under the 'road map,'" Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said at Sunday's Cabinet session.

That body voted 18-1 to adopt an internal report that slammed the government for failing to stop, and on occasion even encouraging, the spread of the outposts.

While Sharon ordered the creation of a committee to deal with the 105 outposts listed in the report, he gave no schedule for evacuations, and he did not refer to the report's recommendation that some government officials be prosecuted.



WORLD REPORT

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Hamas puts Israel in quandary after group agrees to join in elections

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It seems oxymoronic: a terrorist group sworn to Israel's destruction, joining a Palestinian Authority now engaged in political negotiation with the Jewish state.

But this apparently will be the case come July, when Hamas takes part in Palestinian parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip — and puts Ariel Sharon's government in a diplomatic bind.

The radical Islamic group has boycotted elections conducted by the Palestinian Authority, which was formed under the Oslo peace accords of 1993 envisaging peaceful coexistence with Israel.

But on Saturday, Hamas official Mohammed Razal announced that the group had decided to run for seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council "for the sake of the people and to rectify political failings."

The "road map" peace plan calls for the Palestinian Authority to dismantle and disarm Hamas and other terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza.

But Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has made it clear that he has no intention of implementing this clause to the letter. He prefers to talk rival factions into laying down their arms.

Abbas predicted that these talks would bear fruit at a conference in Cairo this week, when he predicted that 13 Palestinian groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, would agree to his cease-fire with Israel.

And Israel, apparently pleased at Abbas' success in calming down Gaza before it quits the coastal territory this summer, has not been protesting too much.

"Against the background of cries for liquidating the infrastructure of terror, the Palestinian leadership realizes, and Israel also understands, that there is no other choice than to cooperate with these organizations, which hold a violent right of veto over the peace process," said Ha'aretz commentator Zvi Barel.

"The readiness of these organizations to participate in Palestinian politics, and at the same time adopt a cease-fire, with Egypt granting them an umbrella of legitimacy, is part of the upheaval currently under way," he said.

Privately, some Israeli officials accept that Hamas may have made a strategic turnaround.

"No one expects the group to change its charter," said one official on condition of anonymity, referring to a document that calls for Israel's destruction.

"The question is how ready it is to act on this. An end to violence and terrorism is always a good thing, even if its motives are cynical."

Before and even during the last four and a half years of fighting, senior Hamas leaders hinted that they could "accept" rather than recognize Israel's existence if Palestinians get statehood in the West Bank and Gaza. Under this doctrine, the group would "suspend" indefinitely its quest to wipe out Israel.

Many believe that in Hamas' scheme of things, the well-being of the Palestinians comes well ahead of the jihad against the Jewish state.

Unlike Islamic Jihad, a group whose activities are devoted exclusively to terrorism and that already has announced that it will

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boycott the July elections, Hamas has a network of charities in the West Bank and Gaza. Its politicians are considered to be honest, in comparison with the corruption that has tainted many Palestinian Authority officials.

"With Hamas, you know who you are dealing with," the Israeli official said.

"If they call off the jihad, that is the way it will be.

And who knows — maybe the very act of getting into politics, of dealing with the day-to-day of nation-building the West Bank and Gaza, will in itself mellow the group."

But Jerusalem is still a long way off from having to deal with a Hamas successor to Abbas.

Razal said his group has no intention of seeking seats in the Palestinian Authority's Cabinet for now.

There is also the prospect of Palestinian infighting.

Fatah, the dominant Palestinian Authority faction, has been watching with concern the popularity Hamas has garnered in local polls, and it is redoubling its efforts to win hearts in the West Bank and Gaza. It's not just a matter of political jockeying: Fatah represents a more moderate Palestinian, who is unhappy with the idea of Hamas ushering in a Muslim theocracy.

An example of this infighting happened Sunday. In the run-up to campus elections in Hebron University, activists from the rival factions faced off with fists and rocks. Eight students were hurt. ■

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Tzedakah boxes auctioned on eBay

By JORDANA ROTHSTEIN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Artist Joanie Rosenthal will exhibit her latest piece in an unexpected place: eBay.

Rosenthal, a New Jersey artist who has drawn illustrations for Time, U.S. News & World Report and The New York Times Magazine and created book covers for Scholastic, Penguin Putnam and other publishing companies, has decorated a metal tzedakah box as part of a fund-raising campaign for the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey.

Ten New Jersey artists, including Rosenthal, have decorated boxes to be sold on eBay, the most popular online auction site. The proceeds will go to benefit the federation's 2005 campaign.

The auction comes as Jewish groups increasingly turn to online auctions as a way to raise money: This week, the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America announced a new agreement with an Internet company that will make it easier for JCCs in North America to use online auctions for fund raising. ■

Rosenthal was inspired by the simplicity of the plain, round metal box she was given. "When I saw the tzedakah box, I appreciated how beautiful it was, standing on its own," she said. "Artists don't always know why they are creating, they just do," she said. "No one knows if they're going to find a gallery to show their work. They might not, they still create.

"The same is true of tzedakah. Everyone knows the concrete reasons for doing volunteer work, but they don't always know why they decide to do it. No one's going to give them an award, they just keep going."

Rosenthal saw her project as a way to involve the next generation in the process of giving. Using a metallic paint, she drew the Hebrew word tzedakah — charity — on her box.

"I'm not sure why I send my kids to a Jewish school, the same way I'm not sure why I create or volunteer. I just do," she said. As she designed the box, "These three things came together. It didn't need to be complex."

The federation project is simple, too. As part of the greater United Jewish Communities' mission to encourage "generous living," cylindrical metal tzedakah boxes were distributed to various federations, with no specific instructions for their use.

The central New Jersey federation had a novel idea. It distributed the boxes to local artists and asked them to decorate them. ■

Debra Livingston, whose work has been shown in such places as the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum in England decided she wanted her box to

appear "precious, because a tzedakah box is something to save and pass down from generation to generation." She decorated her cylinder with gold leaf, mirrors, and the word "give."

"When you're holding this golden thing, I want you to look at yourself, reflect inward and then remember to give

back out," she said.

Meryl Greene Salmon, who has designed and illustrated many medical journals, and who has been making party decorations for nine years, decided on an intricate design. Her box is covered with beads, each of which "had to be glued and placed individually with a pin."

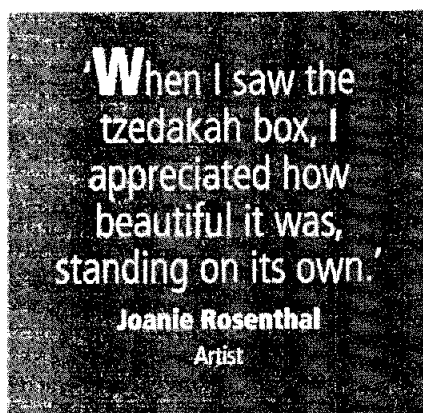
She placed golden Jewish stars on a background of dark blue beads, because, she said, the stars are "the proud symbol of an ancient heritage that stresses unity and helping out one another."

Most important, Salmon wanted to design something beautiful. "I wanted to make something people would leave out, not hide away." That way, she added, when people look at the box they will remember to give tzedakah.

All the artists involved in the project donated their time and materials. Federation representative Naomi Lipstein said that the campaign has not set a financial goal.

"It is very much about raising awareness," she said. "We are just trying to highlight the federation in general, and how we make a difference in day-to-day life."

Bidding on the tzedakah boxes ends Thursday on www.eBay.com. The minimum bid for each box has been set at \$118. ■



THIS WEEK**MONDAY**

■ The U.N. Human Rights Commission convenes its annual six-week session in Geneva. This will be the first session held under U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, who has told Israel's minister of Diaspora affairs, Natan Sharansky, that she hopes for more balanced treatment of Israel.

■ Middle East ambassadors gather in Washington for a forum on prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace, hosted by Americans for Peace Now. The Capitol Hill event will feature Israel's ambassador, Daniel Ayalon; Egypt's ambassador, Nabil Fahmy; Jordan's ambassador, Karim Kawar; and Palestine Liberation Organization representative Hasan Abdel Rahman.

TUESDAY

■ A U.S. appeals court hears oral arguments on motions to overturn Jonathan Pollard's imprisonment. Pollard is seeking access to classified information in the case docket that was used to determine his sentencing, and asking that the statute of limitations be set aside to allow Pollard to argue a claim of ineffective counsel.

■ Investment in Israeli companies is the focus of a conference in New York City. The two-day 2005 U.S./Israel Venture Summit comes as venture-capital interest in Israeli companies continues to rebound from the downturn caused by Palestinian terrorism.

WEDNESDAY

■ The first Joint American-Israeli Conference on Cancer opens in Jerusalem. With more than 200 scientists from the U.S. and Israel expected to attend, this three-day meeting will be one of Israel's largest scientific meetings since the start of the Palestinian uprising.

FRIDAY

■ The United Jewish Communities Western Leadership Conference kicks off three days of leadership training for Jews, aged 25 to 45, from the Midwest and Western regions of the United States. The Beverly Hills conference will draw such speakers as Joshua Malina of "The West Wing" and film star Jonathan Silverman.

SUNDAY

■ The First International Maimonides Conference on Medicine and Ethics kicks off in Tiberias, Israel. The Jewish Agency for Israel along with Israel's Ministries of health and tourism, the Israel Medical Association, Keren Hayesod, Jewish Healthcare International and other groups are sponsoring the five-day event. Israel has declared 2005 to be the Year of Maimonides, marking 800 years since the passing of the great Jewish thinker.

■ More than 700 domestic violence professionals, clergy and others are expected in Washington for Jewish Women International's Second International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community. The event runs through March 23.

Rabbi gets 'groundbreaking' job

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Twenty years after the Conservative movement began ordaining women as rabbis, a large New Jersey congregation has chosen a woman to fill its top rabbinic post, a development movement leaders are hailing as "groundbreaking."

The board of Congregation Beth El in South Orange, which has 575 families, voted on March 7 to appoint Rabbi Francine Roston, 36, as the synagogue's spiritual leader.

Once it becomes official — the contract has not yet been finalized — Roston's appointment as senior rabbi will be the first of a woman to such a post at a Conservative synagogue with more than 500 families.

"We see this as groundbreaking," said Rabbi Perry Raphael Rank, president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative movement's rabbinical arm.

"It's groundbreaking from the perspective that we have been talking about a glass ceiling, and she has broken that glass ceiling and risen to a much larger congregation than women have risen to until this point," said Rank, who is the spiritual leader of Midway Jewish Center in Syoset, N.Y.

"Our feeling was, all things being equal, we would probably have hired a male rabbi — but all things weren't equal," said Aaron Nierenberg, co-chair of Beth El's search committee. "Rabbi Roston impressed us with her knowledge, sense of energy, sense of humor, warmth."

Beth El received 20 applications for the position, and offered 10 of the initial applicants telephone interviews. Of this group, three were women. The list was then narrowed to three finalists, each of whom visited the synagogue for a weekend to lead services, lecture and meet the congregation. Of the final three, only Roston was female.

Women are now about 11 percent of the nearly 1,600 members of the Rabbinical Assembly. According to a Conservative move-

ment survey released over the summer, 83 percent of the assembly's 177 women pulpit rabbis lead congregations of fewer than 250 families, while 17 percent lead shuls of between 250 and 499 families. By contrast, 27 percent of men lead congregations of less than 250 families, 48 percent lead mid-size congregations and 25 percent lead congregations of more than 500 families.

In 1994, after she served as its assistant rabbi for some four years, Chicago's Am Yisrael synagogue — which has 500 member families — appointed Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin as its sole rabbi.

"It's been 20 years now that we've had women ordained as rabbis from within our movement and they've proven themselves to be extremely capable," said Rabbi Reuven Hammer, immediate past president of the International Rabbinical Assembly.

"I think we're reaching a new period of time now when congregations are no longer looking at women rabbis as strange and something that they're not interested in."

Still, Roston's

appointment comes

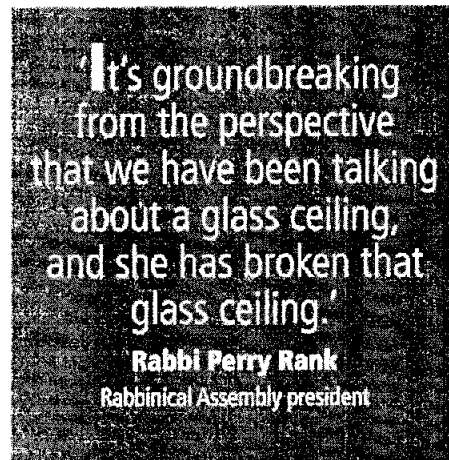
as questions about gender equality in the Conservative rabbinate linger.

According to the movement survey released over the summer, Conservative women rabbis are paid less, occupy fewer senior positions and are more likely to be unmarried than their male counterparts.

The Reform movement, which began ordaining women in 1972, has at least 15 women serving in senior rabbinic positions at congregations with 500 or more households as members.

Of the twelve largest Reconstructionist congregations in the United States, four have women as their senior rabbis, and one has a female assistant rabbi. These shuls range in size from 1,000 member units at the high end down to 237 members on the smaller side. Twenty-four of the movement's 106 total synagogues have women as either senior or assistant rabbis.

(Larry Yudelson of the New Jersey Jewish News contributed to this report.)



NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Iran in Israel's sights?

Israel's Security Cabinet reportedly authorized a plan to attack Iranian nuclear sites.

According to the British newspaper Sunday Times, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened top Cabinet members in his Negev ranch last month to clear the plan, under which F-15 fighters, backed by airborne commandos, would hit nuclear facilities throughout Iran.

Sharon's office rejected the report as a "baseless fabrication."

The Sunday Times said Israel had received agreement in principle from the United States for the plan, on condition it would be implemented only after diplomatic means of getting Iran to come clean on its nuclear program are exhausted.

Cabinet OKs new chief of staff

Israel's Cabinet unanimously approved a new chief of staff of the Israeli army.

Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz, confirmed Sunday, will take up his new position this summer, after the term of the current chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon, ends.

Ya'alon's term was not extended because of his public criticism of government policy toward the Palestinians, political analysts said.

Official wants quick Gaza withdrawal

An Israeli government minister called for the Gaza Strip withdrawal to take just a few days.

Matan Vilnai, a former deputy chief of the military staff, told Cabinet colleagues Sunday that stretching out the summer evacuations from Gaza and the northern West Bank any further would put a major burden on Israel's security services.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has cut the withdrawal schedule to between three and four weeks, beginning July 20.

The army is also considering declaring Gaza a "closed military zone" after Passover to prevent Israeli activists from the West Bank coming across in order to bolster efforts to resist the evacuation.

Reserves being reformed

Israel launched a long-term reform of its military reserves.

Under the plan approved by the Cabinet on Sunday, by 2008 reservists will be called up only for training and wartime purposes — rather than for routine security operations — and for an average of no more than two weeks every year.

The maximum age for reserve duty will be reduced to 40.

The reform is expected to pass a Knesset vote on May 31.

WORLD

Czech man acquitted for publishing 'Mein Kampf'

A Prague court acquitted a man charged with promoting Nazism by publishing a Czech-language version of "Mein Kampf."

Michal Zitko was cleared of charges March 10 for originating a Czech version of the manifesto written by Adolf Hitler.

The edition sold 90,000 copies in 2000 before police intervened.

Tribunal investigates Le Pen

A Paris tribunal is launching a judicial inquiry into comments made by extreme rightist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The panel is investigating whether Le Pen justified war crimes, a criminal human-rights offense in France, in comments made to the extremist magazine Rivarol in January.

Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Front party, said in the

interview that "the German occupation in France wasn't particularly inhumane."

Two other organizations, SOS Racisme and the Association of Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews of France, have filed official complaints. Le Pen called the allegations "absurd."

Al-Jazeera criticized

Al-Jazeera and other Arabic broadcasters promote anti-Western and anti-Semitic opinion in Europe, a think tank affiliated with a Jewish group said.

The Transatlantic Institute, which is affiliated with the American Jewish Committee, said it will present its report Thursday to European Union regulators who are meeting to discuss ways to fight broadcast hate.

Officials with Al-Jazeera, which is considered to be the most independent voice in the Arab world, refused to comment on the report.

BBC sorry for Vanunu interview

The BBC apologized for showing an uncensored interview with Israeli nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu.

The letter of apology issued over the weekend by the BBC was Israel's condition for allowing its Middle East correspondent, Simon Wilson, back into the country.

The Government Press Office in Jerusalem had refused to renew Wilson's work visa after he ignored a request by military censors to see an interview the BBC filmed with Vanunu, who since his release from prison last year has been banned from meeting the foreign media.

Wilson said he regretted violating Israel's security regulations and accepted that his new visa could be revoked if it happens again.

This week the Knesset Law Committee is expected to discuss Vanunu's request to be allowed to leave the country.

The Defense Ministry accuses him of planning to reveal more secrets about his work at the Dimona nuclear plant.

Vanunu, who was jailed for 18 years after discussing his work with Britain's Sunday Times in 1986, denies the allegation.

NORTH AMERICA

Passport controversy in Canada escalates

Canadian officials are recalling about 100 passports that list Jerusalem as part of Israel.

Dan Kingsbury, a spokesperson for Passport Canada, said the government is only "correcting an administrative error" by undertaking the recall because Canada does not recognize that Jerusalem is part of Israel.

"It's contrary to Canada's Middle East policy and contrary to our policy of recognition," Kingsbury said.

"We're not considering changing the policy at this time, as it would be contrary to our obligations under international law, including relevant UN security council resolutions."

B'nai Brith Canada, which in January joined a lawsuit over the matter of people born in Jerusalem having Israel listed in their Canadian passports, reacted angrily to the recall.

Software scores points with hoopsters

Some U.S. college basketball teams used an Israeli-developed software program to train their players.

The University of Kentucky and the University of Memphis have been using the ACE IntelliGym Trainer, a computer game that works on basketball skills, the Israel21c Web site reported.

One of Memphis' star players, first-year guard Darius Washington Jr., says the game has helped him develop. Individual high school players are also buying the package.