

IN THE NEWS

**Thousands in
Gaza solidarity visit**

On Independence Day, tens of thousands of Israelis flocked to Gaza Strip settlements slated for evacuation.

Settler officials said 50,000 people marked Independence Day in Gush Katif on Thursday.

Among the visitors was former Diaspora Affairs Minister Natan Sharansky, who resigned his Cabinet post to protest the impending Israeli withdrawals from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

Unlike previous rallies in Gush Katif, Thursday's gathering included few political protests, though a new synagogue was inaugurated in the Kfar Darom settlement.

**Israel files
U.N. complaint**

Israel is submitting a complaint at the United Nations over the firing of a rocket from Lebanon into a northern Israeli town.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said the incident underscores the need to enforce a U.N. Security Council resolution ordering Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah and other militant groups.

The rocket hit the Israeli town of Shlomi on Wednesday night, damaging a local bakery but causing no injuries.

**Settlers
march illegally**

Israel arrested 22 yeshiva students who refused to leave a Palestinian town in the West Bank.

The students were on their way Thursday to a settlement that is slated to be evacuated this summer under Israel's withdrawal plan.

Also Thursday, a different group of settlers illegally entered Palestinian areas and had to be removed by Israeli soldiers.

Israeli military officials were quoted as criticizing some settler leaders for backing the demonstrations.

The rallies took place as Israelis celebrated the country's 57th Independence Day.

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WORLD REPORT

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Robert A. Cumins

Sallai Meridor, the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel, announced that he would step down a year early.

Surprise resignation of JAFI head sparks speculation on Meridor's future

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — The resignation of one of the most powerful professionals in Jewish life came as a surprise to many of those closest to him — and sparked rumors throughout the Jewish world about Sallai Meridor's future plans.

In a letter Tuesday, Meridor, chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel, informed his staff and volunteer leadership that he would step down early.

After six years as head of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, Meridor said he would leave after the Jewish Agency's board of governors' meeting in June, a year before his term ends.

Names mooted as possible successors include Natan Sharansky, who resigned last week as Israel's minister of diaspora affairs; Shai Hermesh, the agency's treasurer and its second ranking professional; and Ze'ev Bliski, mayor of Ra'anana and a member of the agency's board of governors.

"I believe that the best interest of public organizations require change, and that as a norm public servants should not stay in their chairs forever. Accordingly, the question before me for the past few months has been when to make the change — now or a year from now," Meridor wrote.

"Passing the torch to my successor at the upcoming assembly, which will take place at

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THE
HEADLINES**

■ Sallai Meridor leaves Jewish Agency as observers wonder what he'll do next

Continued from page 1

the end of June, will prevent the downside of a lengthy interim period," he wrote.

It also will allow his successor to "vigorously commence the implementation of the strategic plan," a new action plan the group is putting into place that will focus on building Jewish and Zionist identity worldwide, with particular emphasis on youth.

Many of those closest to Meridor take him at his word.

"I can't emphasize it enough: There's no hidden agenda here," said Carole Solomon of New York, chair of the Jewish Agency's board of governors.

"I believe he felt that given the intensity of the job and the enormity of the responsibility, that after two full terms it would be time for someone else with renewed energy to come in," she said.

"He told me that he was not interested in being a lame duck," said Jay Sarver of St. Louis, the agency's budget and finance chairman.

Others speculate that something else is afoot.

Meridor's resignation comes one week after Sharansky resigned because of his objection to the government's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

Some Jewish communal officials wonder if a job swap between the two men is in the works. Others say Sharansky's anti-disengagement stance would make him an unlikely candidate to represent Israel and world Jewry through the Jewish Agency,

which facilitates immigration to Israel and runs Zionist education programs worldwide.

Sharansky adviser Aryeh Green told JTA that Sharansky "is not pursuing and never has pursued any position at the Jewish Agency."

"The idea that this was some sort of a deal worked out, that Sharansky resigns and then Meridor resigns, is way out of left field," he said.

Rumors abound that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon may offer Meridor the post of ambassador to Britain or the United States.

Others suggest that Meridor, who supports the Gaza withdrawal, could be appointed as Sharon's special ambassador on that issue.

"Sharon needs an ambassador who supports disengagement and who is not a civil servant but a person of stature, a politician," one source said.

Others suggest that the controversial removal of Mike Rosenberg, JAFT's director general of immigration and absorption, may have been a way to provide a top-level opening for a future leader of the agency to fill.

Rosenberg, who was told his contract would not be renewed after several years of service, will stay in his position through next year.

JTA has been unable to confirm any of the speculation.

While it's conceivable that Meridor could be making himself available for a political opportunity, sources say he hasn't been offered anything.

"I spoke to him today and asked what he'll do and he said it wasn't yet known," said Avi Pazner, chairman of Keren Hayesod, which raises funds for the Jewish Agency from Jewish communities outside North America.

Those close to Meridor describe him as a man of integrity who says what he means.

Meridor is a "straight shooter," said Steven Nasatir, president of the Jewish

United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

"I take him at his word," said Nasatir, who is close to Meridor and whose federation heavily supports the Jewish Agency.

"We will be seeing Sallai somewhere else," Nasatir said, though he added, "I have no sense of where that is or what that might be."

Stephen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and immediate past president

of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella body for North American Jewish federations, also doesn't think Meridor has secret plans.

"I don't believe there's any back deal," Hoffman said. "If the prime minister wanted to call him to service, he could call him to service from the chair of the Jewish Agency."

Jewish organizational officials were stunned by the announcement, which comes as efforts are being made to restore order to the agency, which boasts a \$350 million annual budget and has emissaries around the world.

Meridor has pushed for reforms to streamline the Jewish Agency, which some have criticized as a bloated bureaucracy. During his tenure, the agency created a strategic plan to nurture the Zionist identity of Diaspora Jews, and launched MASA, a partnership with the Israeli government to subsidize Diaspora youth on short- and long-term programs in Israel.

Meridor also has pushed for aliyah from North America and helped create the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, an Israeli think tank.

"Sallai provided exemplary leadership for the agency," said John Ruskay, executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York. "By his smarts and his impeccable integrity, he was able to re-engage and reinspire people to the work of the agency."

JTA correspondent Dina Kraft in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.

I believe he felt that given the intensity of the job and the enormity of the responsibility, that after two full terms it would be time for someone else with renewed energy to come in.

Carole Solomon

Chair, Jewish Agency Board of Governors

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Will lame duck Tony Blair turn to Middle East?

By DANIELLA PELED

LONDON (JTA) — The historic third term won by Britain's Labor party may have implications for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was returned to power in the May 6 general elections, long has pledged that helping to bring Israeli and Palestinians closer to an agreement is one of his personal priorities.

Labor's manifesto highlights Mideast peace as a priority for Blair's third term, describing a resolution of the conflict as "crucial to peace in the region and the world."

Danny Shek, chief executive of Bicom, a British Israeli advocacy group, says Blair's re-election comes at a key time in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

As the Israelis prepare to "disengage" from the Gaza Strip this August, it's still not clear if Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will be able to restrain terrorist groups and maintain a tenuous cease-fire.

International involvement — whether economic aid for the Gaza evacuation or diplomatic support for Israel as it struggles with a traumatic process — will be needed in coming months.

The United Kingdom is set to take a prominent position on global affairs as this decisive period begins. Blair will host the G8 summit of world leaders in July in Scotland. Later that month, Britain will

take over the European Union's rotating presidency, holding it until January 2006.

"This puts the U.K. in a leadership position at a critical time," Shek says. "Tony Blair has shown a certain application in his involvement in the Middle East. I suspect that given the chance, he'll follow up on it."

There is an issue that lends further urgency to the prime minister's personal involvement in the peace process.

Blair, 52, has vowed to step down before Britain goes to the polls again.

The next general election is likely to be in four or five years, but it's widely assumed that he will step down long before then in favor of his chancellor, Gordon Brown.

Blair is likely to want to consolidate his place in the history books before he leaves office.

Just as U.S. presidents in their second terms have turned their attention to the Middle East, Blair may consider leaving his mark on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Although Blair brought his party back

to power after nearly two decades in the political wilderness, controversial issues such as Blair's support for the Iraq war have tarnished his image, and are believed to have contributed to Labor's drop in these elections from 161 to 67 seats in Parliament.

Analysts say Blair may turn to foreign policy in a bid to end his term with a success. Tackling the Israel-Palestinian conflict possibly could bring the international community together, compensate for the failures in Iraq and sweeten transatlantic relations

'Tony Blair has shown a certain application in his involvement in the Middle East. I suspect that given the chance, he'll follow up on it.'

Danny Shek

Chief executive of British Israeli advocacy group

**BEHIND
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BYLINES**

soured by the war.

This "might be part of the legacy," acknowledged the spokesman for the pro-Israel lobby. "There is clearly a possibility, within the context of the G8 and the E.U. presidency, of taking things further."

Though former President Clinton, Blair's friend and hero, has been blamed for pressuring Israel and the Palestinians into the disastrous July 2000 Camp David summit — for which neither party was ready — Shek thinks Blair's approach is more pragmatic.

The Labor leader knows that "it is time to do what is feasible," Shek says. ■

Non-Jewish Poles see Judaism as vital to their identity

By CAROLYN SLUTSKY

KRAKOW, Poland (JTA) — There are more Jewish studies majors at the Jagiellonian University here than there are Jews in the city.

Last week, some of them, along with an estimated 3,000 other Polish students and teachers from across the country, participated in the March of the Living. They were among approximately 18,000 people from all over the world, Jews and non-Jews, gathering together to remember the Holocaust.

The inclusion of so many Polish participants was a first for the March of the Living, which was launched in 1988.

The Polish American Jewish Alliance organized a week-long joint trip for 15 Jewish studies students from Poland, none of them Jewish, and a college group from the Anti-Defamation League. The American contingent included both Jewish and non-Jewish Judaic studies majors.

The students met in Krakow, where they were treated to a performance of Jewish song and dance and to short speeches by other Polish students, who discussed Jewish life in Poland today.

As Justyna Kutrzeba, a Jewish studies major from Krakow, later put it, "Jews had a long history in Poland, and we have to understand them to understand ourselves."

The contingents then traveled to Auschwitz for the March of the Living itself, to Majdanek, a death camp near the city of Lublin, and to the Warsaw Ghetto.

Mateusz Bochenski, who is from Poland, noted that "Poland is a special link" in Holocaust history. "We grew up with remembrance," he said. "Our grandfathers told us about the Jews. It's part of our history, and we can't say it's not."

Miriam Klein Kassenoff, a Holocaust survivor and educator from Miami who accompanied the students, said the most surprising part of the March of the Living for her was meeting the "wonderfully educated Polish youth, incredibly sensitive to the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust."

She said that when she returns to the United States she plans to add to her educational materials the idea that Poles were under occupation by the Nazis, and that to accuse them of being accomplices to the Holocaust does not tell the whole story. ■

**MARCH
OF THE
LIVING**

Chabad presents the Jewish face of Venice

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

VENICE (JTA) — At any given moment, there are probably far more Jewish tourists in Venice than the 400-some local Jews who live scattered around the lagoon city. One recent estimate said as many as 300,000 Jews visit each year.

As elsewhere in Europe, a battle of style, ideology and ritual practice pits the worldwide Chabad movement, with its emphasis on outreach and high-profile public Jewish celebration, against that tiny local established Jewish community, which is proud of its traditions and bent on preserving its own historic self-identity.

Jewish tourists are part of the equation. For Chabad, which began operations in Venice 14 years ago, they are prime targets for outreach. Chabad welcomes them with open arms on Shabbat and other holidays.

For the established community, the tourists are a transient fact of life and a source of income, as well as a source of congregants to make up a minyan each Shabbat.

"This is typical of Venice as a whole," says longtime Venice Jewish community member Aldo Izzo. "Tourists come and go."

Jews have lived in Venice since medieval times; the old Jewish cemetery on the Venice Lido was founded in the 14th century.

In 1516 Venetian rulers confined the city's Jews to the area of today's ghetto, forming the world's first enclosed district where Jews were forced to live. The very

word "ghetto" was born here, as the enclosed area had once been the site of a foundry, or "getto" in Venetian dialect.

It is Chabad — the relative newcomers to the city — whose public face is most prominent and whose Jewish facilities are most accessible.

A big portrait of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, looms from the picture window of the Chabad House and outreach center on the Ghetto Novo, the neighborhood's

main piazza. A few steps away is a Chabad yeshiva and synagogue, with 12 students mainly from Israel and the United States.

Around the corner is Gam-Gam, a cheery Chabad-run kosher restaurant that offers Israeli and Italian specialties and free Shabbat meals. "In the tourist season, we can have as many as 400 to 500 people for Shabbos dinner. They sometimes eat in three shifts," says Shachar Banin, whose Italian-born husband, Ramy, became Venice's Chabad emissary in 1991.

At Sukkot, Chabad erects a public sukkah outside the restaurant and also on the Ghetto Novo. In addition, it builds a sukkah on a boat and cruises the Venice canals, stopping at intervals to offer free glasses of kosher wine to passersby. For Chanukah they put up a 25-foot public menorah, and also erect a menorah on a gondola and sail it around the canals.

This high-profile presence has led to tensions. Some years ago, complaints by non-Jewish neighbors about the yeshiva's noisy singing made newspaper headlines.

And many in the

local Jewish community, feeling their role and identity usurped, bristle when

Chabad activities, such as a newly opened Jewish kindergarten that competes with the local communal school, are referred to as projects of the "Venetian Jewish community."

Relations were so bad in 1996 that the board of the local community sent a letter to all community members as well as national Jew-

ish organizations complaining about Banin's activities, accusing him of failing to respect the local community and its traditions and of trying to undermine or replace its activities.

Among other things, the letter said Banin planned to have a Lubavitch rabbi, rather than the local Venice chief rabbi, certify kashrut at Gam-Gam. Also, it said he had tricked the community into letting him use the synagogue for an anniversary celebration that turned out to be the prelude to a wedding of a Milan Chabad rabbi, without the prior knowledge or authorization of Venice's own chief rabbi.

It complained, too, that he had staged the joyful celebration of his own wedding at the same time and place that the Venice Jewish community was holding a somber Holocaust commemoration.

Today, Chabad and the local Jewish community have established a truce. But frictions still exist beneath the surface, and some members of the community on principle still refuse to eat at Gam-Gam.

"I appreciate Chabad for their sense of humanity, their welcoming philosophy and their generosity," says Izzo. "But sometimes, the ancient Jewish community feels a bit displaced. Over the years, there has been a certain antagonism, and there have been bad periods, jealousies, highs and lows. Today things are smoother. There are still frictions, but it's mostly not out in the open."

I appreciate Chabad for their sense of humanity, their welcoming philosophy and their generosity. But sometimes, the ancient Jewish community feels a bit displaced.'

Aldo Izzo

Member of Venice's Jewish community

**BATTLING FOR
EUROPE'S JEWS
PART 4**



Chabad.org

Chabad's sukkah boat has become an annual presence on the canals of Venice during Sukkot.

Chabad attempts to broaden base in Hungary

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BUDAPEST (JTA) — A bold new sign gleams above an imposing doorway on one of Budapest's main downtown boulevards. "Keren Or Chabad Synagogue" it reads in Hungarian, in bright blue letters flanked by the picture of a menorah. In Hebrew it reads "Bais Chabad."

This is the new, high-profile premises of Chabad in the Hungarian capital, a combination synagogue and community center, situated in a building almost directly across the street from the grand Dohany Street synagogue, the historic symbol of Jewish life in the city.

Chabad has had a vital and growing presence in Budapest since the late 1980s, when American-born Rabbi Boruch Oberlander, son of Holocaust survivors from Hungary, arrived as the country's first shaliach, or emissary, just as the fall of communism enabled Jewish outreach and revival.

Chabad runs a yeshiva and other educational programs in Budapest, publishes books and sends a newsletter to what is reputed to be the largest Hungarian Jewish mailing list. It holds free Friday night dinners after services in the small synagogue in the yeshiva complex, hosts seders and distributes tons of matzah for Passover and — as it does the world over — organizes public menorah-lighting ceremonies and other festive events.

But Chabad aspires to be more of a player on the Hungarian Jewish scene. Some critics go so far as to say Chabad's latest attempts to expand operations amount to a sort of "shell game" aimed at obtaining government funding — charges the group denies.

As many as 90,000 Jews are believed to live in Budapest, but the overwhelming majority are assimilated and many are unaffiliated.

Functioning outside the organized Jewish establishment, Chabad appeals to Jews who are shy about approaching official institutions, who are turned off by establishment traditions, politics or personalities — or who are captivated by a charismatic Jewish embrace.

The inauguration of Keren Or in January, with a gala ceremony attended by Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi, Yona Metzger, local officials and visiting Chabad rabbis, opened a new chapter in Chabad activities.

And the boldness of the new center's sign and the prominence of its location are telling signals of the movement's aspirations.

Chabad is involved in setting up a new Jewish community that, if its goals are met, will mirror established Jewish communal structures and compete for funding.

Keren Or's red-carpeted reception area is dominated by a huge portrait of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, and its streetfront sign proclaims it a Chabad institution. But the facility also houses a Jewish entity that was formally registered last year as the Unified Hungarian Israelite Community, known as EMIH — which its organizers describe as the resurrected embodiment of one of Hungary's traditional Jewish streams.

Status Quo Ante was one of the three official Jewish streams that emerged in the 19th century, when Hungarian Jewry formally, and acrimoniously, split into rival religious factions. The two main factions were the dominant Neolog — or the Hungarian version of Reform — and a traditionalist Orthodox community. The much smaller Status Quo Ante group represented Jews who followed Orthodox practice but opposed the formal division.

Today, the dominant stream in Hungary is still Neolog, and a small autonomous Orthodox community also functions. But for all practical purposes, the traditional Status Quo Ante community had long since disappeared.

EMIH was registered with Hungarian authorities last May as an officially recognized "church," or religious body, after obtaining the requisite 100 signatures. Chabad was instrumental in this effort.

Such recognition puts EMIH on a legal par with the Neolog and Orthodox communities. This means it is eligible for state funding and also for the 1 percent of their income tax that taxpayers may forward to certain recognized institutions.

Many in the established Jewish world view the Chabad-backed resurrection of Status Quo Ante with skepticism, describing it as a political or economic move.

"The movement to establish this third leg of Hungarian Jewry was a way of getting



Chabad.org

A Chabad representative helps a young Jewish concert-goer put on tefillin at the 2004 Sziget Festival in Budapest.

money," says one source, who did not want to be identified. "It is a different game here than in America, where there is no government funding for religions. Here, they set the budget for religious organizations and these organizations fight to get it. It can be dirty."

Critics also suggest that establishing a new community that claims to be the heir of a traditional stream could be a way for Chabad to "turn itself" from a "foreign" movement into a Hungarian movement, thus gaining both standing and adherents.

EMIH's spiritual leader, the Hungarian-born Chabad Rabbi Shlomo Koves, bluntly rejects the criticism.

Despite the fact that his group shares premises with a Chabad House and a new Chabad synagogue, and despite the fact that he himself is a Chabad rabbi, EMIH, he says, is an autonomous body.

Koves, an articulate 26-year-old who was born into a nonreligious leftist family in Budapest and left home at 13 to study in Lubavitch yeshivas in Israel, Europe and the United States, says about 200 people attended a founding meeting at which he was chosen to be EMIH's rabbi.

"The people who were there and who did this were Hungarian Jews," he says. "They were mostly not that religious, but are part of the renaissance and the Jewish revival that there is today in Hungary." ■

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'They were mostly not that religious, but are part of the renaissance and the Jewish revival that there is today in Hungary.'

Rabbi Shlomo Koves

Survey looks at the children of intermarriage

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — A new survey of adult children of intermarried parents shows a high level of Jewish cultural identification and interest in Jewish studies, combined with low levels of childhood Jewish education and religious attachment.

Ninety young adults from Boston, Chicago and San Francisco, each with one non-Jewish parent, described their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community in recent face-to-face interviews run by the Jewish Outreach Institute. Key findings from the study were presented Wednesday in San Francisco. The full report will be released later this month, and the institute's executive director, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, says he hopes Jewish organizations will use it to design programming to reach that growing population.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests a population that "feels Jewish" in many ways, despite a lack of Jewish education or affiliation.

Just 30 percent of those interviewed identify with Judaism as a religion, but almost 70 percent say that being Jewish is important to them. Those who did not celebrate any Jewish rituals or holidays describe being Jewish in cultural terms — reading Jewish books, going to Jewish movies — or in terms of social action, such as giving to charity and working on tikkun olam projects.

One respondent said, "The older I get, the more I feel I want to cling to my Jewish roots, especially in these times, to see an alternative to the Christian right."

Concerning formative Jewish experiences, one-third said they'd had some formal Jewish education as children, but a large proportion mentioned two specific Jewish experiences as being meaningful: being taken to see "Fiddler on the Roof" and/or "Schindler's List."

In other words, survey analysts wrote, "For many of these young people, Jewish history as filtered through a Hollywood or Broadway lens was their sole 'Jewish experience' while growing up."

The institute's assistant executive director, Paul Golin, says the interesting aspect of this response was that this population understood such films as touching their Jewish core. "A non-Jewish Ameri-

can seeing these films would not be having a Jewish experience," he muses. "What else is out there in secular society that could be experienced as a Jewish experience? And how do we build a bridge between that experience and deeper Jewish engagement?"

Despite the minimal nature of their religious upbringing, nearly 40 percent of those interviewed had enrolled in a Jewish studies course in college, and 78 percent said they wanted to transmit a Jewish identity to their children. This finding conflicts with the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001, which found that just 24 percent of students with one Jewish parent had taken a Jewish studies course.

Other findings cannot be accurately compared, as questions were worded differently in each survey. The same is true of the 2002 Hillel study of first-year Jewish college students.

Olitzky says the study reveals a population curious about its Jewish identity and ripe for creative outreach by Jewish organizations, particularly during the college years.

"If these kids are gaining their Jewish experiences through secular means, Jewish institutions need to exploit those secular means," he says, instead of "working solely within the walls of their own institutions."

For example, he suggests that instead

of running its own Jewish film festival, Hillel might "insinuate a Jewish film" into an already existing nondenominational film festival, thus providing a "non-branded Jewish experience" for young people from intermarried homes who are interested in their Jewish heritage but might not step into a campus Jewish organization.

The study also revealed how impor-

tant celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah is to this group. "We didn't know how significant that was," Olitzky says. "Take a typical kid from an intermarried home, with no childhood Jewish experience. He gets to the age of 12 or 13, he goes to his friends' bar mitzvahs, comes home and says, 'I want one.'"

"How will the synagogue community respond to that? Will they say, 'You have to be a member'? 'You have to have gone through our religious school'?"

Another interesting finding concerns the level of comfort these young adults have with their dual religious identity. Many describe themselves as half-Jewish, seemingly unaware that the Reform and Reconstructionist movements accept patrilineal as well as matrilineal descent.

That seems to apply to their parents as well: While 77 percent of respondents with Jewish mothers were encouraged to identify with the Jewish religion, that number dropped to 45 percent for respondents with Jewish fathers.

'The older I get, the more I feel I want to cling to my Jewish roots, especially in these times, to see an alternative to the Christian right.'

Survey respondent

Israeli university may sue British union

NEW YORK (JTA) — An Israeli university threatened to boycott a British teachers union over an academic boycott.

Haifa University said it might sue for a retraction and damages because the association defamed the university by publishing the boycott resolution on its Web site.

The union voted recently to boycott Bar-Ilan University for its alleged support of Israel's presence in the West Bank, and Haifa University because of accusations that it

mistreated a radical left-wing professor.

The association is expected to reconsider its boycott later this month. In a related development, Jewish studies scholars in the United States criticized the British boycott.

The American Academy of Jewish Research and the Association of Jewish Studies said the boycott is an "egregious assault on academic freedom and a woeful misreading of the role of Israeli academics and the Israeli university."

YOM HA'ATZMAUT FEATURE

Israel mourns and celebrates as emotions surge

By JONATHAN UDREN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It's springtime in Israel, and I'm feeling what I have to call emotional whiplash.

Only a week after the concerts and day trips of the Passover holiday, a wailing siren cuts through the morning air, screaming out the memories of the Holocaust dead. My mind ricochets between images of playful splashing in the cool Mediterranean and the sickening thought of Auschwitz's burning smokestacks.

Just a little more than a week later, it's Memorial Day, Yom Hazikaron. In Israel, Memorial Day is not a day for barbecues, when the white shoes can come out of the closet, but a time for real national mourning. In a country where nearly everyone serves in the army, nearly everyone knows someone who was lost.

Thousands pass through Mount Herzl, the national military cemetery, placing stones or wreaths on graves. Some graves are freshly dug, some have grass growing lushly around them. Television and radio waves are filled with documentaries and stories of our recent battles and of the people we lost along the way.

And suddenly, with the setting of the sun, Independence Day, Yom Ha'atzmaut, arrives with a flash of fireworks popping over the night sky. It continues with the family and friends barbecuing together, celebrating this modern-day miracle.

The emotion is inescapable, even to a new immigrant like me.

Had it not been for the pain I felt that day at Mount Herzl, then I could not have felt the joy of a reunited Jerusalem so deeply. Only when I truly let the loss of a soldier into my heart could I taste the sweetness of victory, as I savored what so many others had fought and died for. ■

Jonathan Udren is a freelance journalist and editor from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He made aliyah in 2003 and lives in Jerusalem.

The Rabbi's cat and other stories

By LAUREN ELKIN

PARIS (JTA) — Comic books aren't just for kids anymore. They've been enjoying a popular explosion among readers of all ages.

One of the stars of the explosion in France is Joann Sfar, an enfant terrible whose work has become so popular that it can be found on the bookshelves of hip intellectuals here.

The prolific Sfar, 33, at last count is the author of 40 different comic-book series, including the wildly popular "Little Vampire" and "Big Vampire." But only two of them are available in English, and they have been aimed mainly at young adult readers.

This summer, however, Sfar's profile in the English-speaking world is likely to be raised: The first volume of "The Rabbi's Cat," one of his best-loved series in France, will be released in English by Pantheon Books in August. Translations of "Big Vampire" and "The Tree Man" are in the works.

The series chronicles the adventures of a talking cat, who lives in Algeria with a rabbi and his daughter. The first volume recounts the cat's desire to have a bar mitzvah. Along the way, it tells the story of how the cat learned to talk — he ate the parrot — and how he took on "the rabbi's rabbi," chiding his master's teacher for his narrow, dogmatic approach to Judaism. ■

Sfar's universe abounds in supernatural, magical, monstrous and otherwise unusual creatures. Readers will find philosophers, centaurs, talking trees, friendly vampires who grow young instead of old, talking cats and even the Golem.

Breaking from traditional comic books in style as well as content, Sfar's drawings are fluid, energetic and at times even haphazard. He is influenced less by Marvel Comics than by the cartoons in the New Yorker, and has described his "Dungeon" series — created with collaborator Lewis Trondheim — as "Conan the Barbarian meets The Muppet Show." The description is apt — it's a series about a dungeon guarded by a duck.

Sfar's work is an entertaining and

thought-provoking way for readers of all ages and religions to feel the warm glow of Jewish experience and Jewish belief. ■

Born to an Ashkenazi mother from Ukraine and a Sephardi father from Algeria, Sfar says that he feels compelled to educate his readers about the North African Jewish community in France, a subject that he says is misunderstood in France.

He says that he often speaks at schools, where he finds that few children of North African descent — Jews or non-Jews — realize that there was a robust Jewish presence there until the middle of the 20th century.

"There's a terrible lack of education there: These children don't know where they came from," he says. "I just want to show that there were always these two communities," Jewish and Arab, "living side by side there."

He adds, "Of course, they didn't always get along, but their two cultures coexisted for a very long time."

Sfar holds a master's degree in philosophy, and that is evident everywhere

in his work. "I'm more of a talmudist than a kabbalist," he says. "I'm less interested in mysticism, or in questions of whether or not there is a God, and more interested in the daily life of my characters."

Some readers, he says, have misunderstood the rabbi's cat's critical questioning of religious life, "but actually, as the Talmud says, the good student is the one who asks questions. The more you attack the law, the more you reinforce it."

Sfar continues, "There's a tendency in the Jewish community to make people feel guilty. It forces the issue to be about roots, but I would rather talk about heritage."

"With your heritage, you have the right to keep all of it or not, as you decide. My father wanted me to marry a Jewish girl, so I could have Jewish children and repopulate the Jewish community. But love happens when and where it happens, and so I could not do what my father wanted.

"I'm sorry, but my love life can't be used to compensate for what Hitler did." ■

'I'm more of a talmudist than a kabbalist. I'm less interested in mysticism, or in questions of whether or not there is a God, and more interested in the daily life of my characters.'

Joann Sfar
Cartoonist

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

HIAS happy with immigration reform

Jewish groups praised a proposed reform to U.S. immigration policies. Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) introduced immigration reform legislation Thursday designed to secure U.S. borders and integrate immigrants into American society.

The measure was backed by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the American Jewish Committee.

"It's time our elected officials came together to sort out the myriad immigration issues facing this country with a solid, secure and humane plan that will benefit Americans and people who want to become Americans," said Leonard Glickman, HIAS' president and CEO.

JDC lauded as charity

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was lauded by an independent monitoring group.

Charity Navigator named the JDC one of the top-10 "slam-dunk" charities for its fiscal health and for respecting donors' rights.

The complete list is available at charitynavigator.org.

\$20 million goes to Weizmann Institute

The fund-raising arm of an Israeli university received a \$20 million gift.

The Willner family pledged \$20 million to the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science to establish and endow the Willner Family Leadership Institute.

The institute will focus on science and technology and on developing lay leadership. Dr. Albert Willner is president of the committee.

Swastika mars campus house

A swastika was painted on a building housing Jewish students next to the UCLA campus.

The graffiti was painted Tuesday on the front of the Bayit, a cooperative housing site.

University police are investigating the incident as a possible hate crime. The Bayit displays a Star of David in a front window.

American veterans of Israel's war remembered

West Point will host a commemoration of North American volunteers who died in Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

Amir Ofek, an Israeli official in New York, will attend Sunday's ceremonies honoring West Point graduate Col. David "Mickey" Marcus in a program sponsored by the American Veterans of Israel.

Marcus was one of 40 North American volunteers to die in Israel's War of Independence.

WORLD

Lawyer: I'm suing Hungary

A lawyer said he would sue Hungary in a U.S. court for keeping art stolen by the Nazis.

U.S. Holocaust claims lawyer Ed Fagan told Reuters that the suit would be filed Thursday on behalf of the Association of Holocaust Victims for Restitution of Artwork and Masterpieces, and concerns paintings that were owned by Baron Ferenc Hatvany, a prominent Jewish aristocrat in prewar Hungary whom the Nazis deported to a labor camp in 1944.

Later, up to 165 of his paintings were looted.

The lawsuit specifically targets Hungary, the Hungarian National Gallery, the Fine Arts Museum in Budapest and the Ministry of Culture.

Some 20 paintings from Hatvany's collection are on display in the Hungarian National Gallery.

German: Israel needs military might

Israel has to retain military supremacy over its neighbors, Germany's foreign minister said.

Joschka Fischer told Germany's Die Zeit newspaper on Wednesday that Israel needs the upper hand because it's still not accepted by most of its neighbors.

Fischer admitted that many Europeans don't agree with him.

"Many people in Europe, not only in Germany, no longer understand why Israel needs to be in a position of military supremacy," he said.

A Holocaust memorial for Brussels

Brussels will get a Holocaust memorial. The Brussels City Council recently approved the memorial.

Brussels resident Martin Gray, a concentration camp survivor, was behind the campaign, which will receive one-third of its estimated \$635,000 funding from the city.

Philanthropic foundations and the Brussels regional government will finance the rest. It's not known when the memorial will be completed.

MIDDLE EAST

Arabs mark the 'Catastrophe'

Israeli Arabs commemorated what they call the "Catastrophe" of the founding of the State of Israel.

Some 5,000 Israeli Arabs and Jews rallied to mark the "Nakba" on Thursday in the Galilee, near a site that was an Arab village before the founding of Israel in 1948.

Elsewhere, Israeli Arabs visited other areas that were Arab villages before 1948.

The demonstrators included Israeli Arabs who still claim to be "internally displaced" after 57 years, though in many cases they live a mile or two from their former homes.

Schindler's factory to reopen for tourists

Oskar Schindler's factory in Krakow will be rebuilt.

The German entrepreneur saved more than 1,200 Jews from the Holocaust by giving them work in his enamel-goods factory in Poland, but the building, featured in Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List," has sunk into disrepair and tourists have been kept away.

Its new owner, Krakow's tourist office, will clean and reopen it.

In the name of the father

The daughter of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad won a military honor.

Sgt. Yuval Arad, who is doing her national service as a support staffer in an elite airborne unit, was among several dozen Israeli conscripts who received citations for excellence from President Moshe Katsav and the Israeli army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon.

Arad, who was a baby when her father bailed out of his crippled jet over Lebanon in 1986 and disappeared into captivity, previously had avoided the limelight.

Officials at the annual Independence Day event vowed to keep up their quest to find Ron Arad or his remains.

Hospital experiments slammed

Israel's Health Ministry ordered a crackdown on illegal experiments on hospital patients.

The order for greater oversight was issued Wednesday after the state comptroller said in an annual report this week that dozens of Israeli patients, including minors and the mentally handicapped, had been subjected to illegal experiments.

Many of the tests were for new drugs. One elderly patient died from complications resulting from an unspecified experiment but the incident was not investigated for months, the state comptroller said.