

IN THE NEWS

Benjamin Netanyahu challenges Ariel Sharon

Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he would challenge Ariel Sharon for the Likud Party leadership and Israel's premiership.

Netanyahu, who recently quit as finance minister to protest Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, made his announcement Tuesday.

Netanyahu accused Sharon of turning his back on the Likud's founding principles by ceding land unilaterally to the Palestinians.

A Likud primary is expected by year's end, and while national elections are not scheduled until November 2006, political analysts believe they may be held earlier given the domestic instability created by the Gaza withdrawal.

Roberts pushed for religious inclusion

The nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court suggested in 1984 that President Reagan's references to "the church" or "churches" be changed to include synagogues and other houses of worship.

John Roberts, who was a White House adviser at the time, said in a White House memo that Reagan should not speak of "the church" in remarks to a Dallas prayer breakfast.

Roberts recommended that the language be changed to refer to religion more generally. Confirmation hearings for Roberts begin next week.

Ukrainian president condemns Kiev beating

Ukraine's president condemned the beatings of two yeshiva students in Kiev.

"We should spare no effort to ensure that such things never happen again," Viktor Yushchenko said in a statement Tuesday.

One of the students beaten in Sunday's attack remains in a coma; the other suffered less serious injuries.

Due to Labor Day, the JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, Sept. 5.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Jews who fled Katrina's wrath finding shelter from the storm

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Adam Bronstone barely slept at night.

After evacuating New Orleans and heading west to Houston on Saturday to avoid Hurricane Katrina, he had a lot on his mind.

"You're worried about where it's going to hit," said Bronstone, director of communications for the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans. "You're worried about the place you live in; the place you work; the synagogue I go to, which is near the lake; the federation office, which is on a beautiful campus that's only three years old and is also near the lake. I worry about where I'm going to be next week."

Bronstone is among the 10,000-12,000 Jews from New Orleans and its environs who are believed to have fled the city to stay out of harm's way. He has taken up residence with a friend who works at Houston's Israeli Consulate.

Other consulate employees have taken in refugees from the hurricane as well, he said.

Katrina slammed cities and towns along the Gulf Coast on Monday, hitting portions of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida with racing winds and an engulfing downpour.

By Tuesday afternoon, reports indicated that nearly 80 people had died as a result of the storm, most in Mississippi, but that state's governor said he expected the death toll to climb.

In New Orleans, levees overflowed and pumps failed, leaving part of the city under four to five feet of water. There were reports of bodies floating in the flood water.

The storm tore off a large section of the

roof of the Louisiana Superdome, the football stadium where some 10,000 people had taken shelter.

According to an Associated Press report, neighborhoods along part of Lake Pontchartrain were flooded, forcing residents onto their roofs.

It was too early to assess damage to Jewish sites in the area. Among sites of Jewish interest is New Orleans' Touro Synagogue, which bills itself as the oldest Jewish house of worship in America outside of the original 13 colonies.

Jewish organizations in the region and beyond pitched in to help out those touched by Katrina.

A Jewish camp in Mississippi was opened to New Orleans residents fleeing the storm. Nearly 150 evacuees, including some disabled adults, took shelter at the Reform

movement's Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica.

Three Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries remained in New Orleans to help residents who couldn't leave the city.

Among them was Rabbi Yossi Nemes. Nemes received a panicked phone call from a visiting Jewish family that had been evicted from their hotel, which was shuttering up against the storm, a Chabad spokesman told JTA.

The family couldn't make it to the Superdome quickly enough to miss the storm and, concerned for its safety, contacted Nemes — who decided to stay in his own home and take in the visitors.

Nemes could not be reached by telephone. Thirteen people were staying on the top floor of his home as the storm raged, driving water in through the roof. The first floors were flooded

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Escaping storm's wrath, Katrina evacuees welcomed by neighboring Jews

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and toxic water coursed through the home's taps, the Chabad spokesman said.

The United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations, established an emergency mailbox to accept donations to aid both the Jewish and general communities affected by the storm. UJC also is encouraging federations and affiliated communities to open independent mailboxes to raise money.

"The Jewish community has always been at the forefront of responding to human and natural disasters, and is playing a major role in alleviating such devastation," said Carol Smokler, chair of the UJC Emergency Committee. "Hurricane Katrina is taking a human, emotional and property toll of historic proportions. UJC and the Jewish federations of North America will, as always, respond rapidly to ease the challenges and suffering of our Jewish brethren and their neighbors."

Barry Swartz, UJC senior vice president, said the organization has a system in place to offer expertise to local communities in need.

"As soon as we knew it was heading toward the Gulf, we were in touch with the members of the federated communities and the network of independent communities," he said. "We gave them advice in terms of preparation. We've been doing this for years, so they're used to it and we're used to it."

B'nai B'rith has activated its disaster relief fund to collect money for Katrina's victims.

"A natural disaster of this magnitude will certainly create huge need," said Joel Kaplan, B'nai B'rith's international president. "B'nai B'rith's disaster relief fund will help us provide assistance as we have done in the case of natural and man-made disasters for nearly 140 years."

The Union for Reform Judaism also opened a disaster relief fund. As soon as damages are assessed, the group said, it will decide which organizations are best equipped to aid victims, and will make donations to these groups.

While many New Orleans Jews headed west to Houston — which under normal circumstances is a five- to six-hour drive but, because of traffic, took some people more than 10 hours — others landed in Birmingham, Ala.; Nashville; Atlanta; Austin, Texas; Florida and elsewhere.

About 75 of those who ended up in Houston gathered for a special prayer service Monday evening at Houston's Congregation Emanu El. Eric Stillman, executive director of the New Orleans federation, said it was comforting to pray, share and reflect with a group of people experiencing the same sense of uncertainty as he was.

"It was wonderful," he said from his hotel room in Houston. "The frustrating thing is that none of us really knows when we'll be able to go back to New Orleans and see the condition of our homes, our Jewish agencies, our businesses, the community as a whole."

Stillman said he had been monitoring the situation back home on television and over the Internet, but didn't know anybody who had remained behind in the city who could update him on the condition of specific sites.

Phone calls to several synagogues in Mississippi and Alabama went unanswered Tuesday.

Bronstone's New Orleans-based cell phone service was going in and out, he said, which made it tough to get work done. But the CEO of Houston's federation, Lee Wunsch, allowed Bronstone

and Stillman to use his organization's facilities.

"I wanted to be able to go in and get some work done and feel useful," Bronstone said. "This is the story of 'kol Yisrael areivim zeh b'zeh,'" an expression that means that Jews look after one another. "In times of need, Jews always help each other. This is one of those times."

Wunsch said welcoming other federation employees was a "no brainer."

"We're glad to help out," he said. "Houston's not new to hurricanes and there's another Jewish community close

by that needs our assistance, and we're glad to do whatever we can to help."

At the North Louisiana Jewish Federation in Shreveport, in the northwest corner of Louisiana about 60 miles south of Arkansas, there haven't been many appeals from Jews in need.

Area hotels are booked solid, said Howard Ross, the federation's executive director, but no requests for shelter or synagogues have come in. In fact, Ross said, the only hurricane-related request they received was from a Jewish man looking for love.

The note "came over the Web, through our feedback," Ross said. "A message saying, 'I'm in Shreveport; I was forced out of New Orleans. I'm a single, 57-year-old man and I was wondering if there are any singles events.'"

(Contributions through B'nai B'rith should be made payable to the B'nai B'rith Disaster Relief Fund and sent to: B'nai B'rith International, 2020 K Street, N.W., Seventh Floor, Washington, D.C., 20006; or online by going to www.bnairbith.org and clicking on the link for disaster relief.

Contribution through the UJC can be made online at www.ujc.org or by mail at United Jewish Communities, P.O. Box 30, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y., 10113, attention: Hurricane Katrina. Mark the memo section of checks with "Katrina."

Contributions through the Union for Reform Judaism can be made at www.urj.org or give. Information on the Disaster Relief Fund can be found at www.urj.org/relief.)

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Eric Stillman

Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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U.S. Air Force unveils guidelines on religion

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. Air Force officials are hoping new guidelines for religious tolerance will end an atmosphere some soldiers say is unwelcoming to religious minorities.

But while some are calling the new regulations a good first step, others remain concerned that little will change at academies and Air Force bases around the country.

The guidelines, sent Monday from the Pentagon, say commanders should try to comply with religious accommodations for all airmen and women, and that senior airmen and women need to be sensitive to the fact that personal expressions of faith might be viewed as official statements.

The new regulations come amid reports from the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., that religious minorities felt pressure to prioritize their military duties over religious observance, and that they felt they were in an overtly Christian atmosphere.

Chaplains at the school reportedly spoke of evangelizing to the “unchurched,” and the football coach made references to Jesus.

The new regulations are for the entire Air Force, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said last week that they could be replicated throughout the military.

“It’s one piece of a broader initiative that will, I hope, allow for a real clarification of the real vision in the military,” said Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, a retired military chaplain who was hired by the Air Force last month to oversee implementation of “values and vision.”

The regulations focus on the need for sensitivity toward people of all faiths or no faith. Chaplains are reminded that they’re obligated to minister to people of other faiths and those without religion.

“They must be as sensitive to those who do not welcome offerings of faith, as they are generous in sharing their faith with those who do,” the guidelines said. “In addition, they must remain sensitive to the responsibilities of superior rank, and they should respect professional settings where mandatory participation may make expressions of religious faith inappropriate.”

Resnicoff said the message was clear

to chaplains that they have to respect the rights of all soldiers.

“A chaplain has to understand that he or she cannot do certain things as a chaplain that a clergy person can,” he said. “We give power to people in uniform to accomplish a mission; we do not give them power to change the religious beliefs of other.”

The guidelines say all requests for religious accommodation

should be approved unless precluded by military necessity, and commanders should try to avoid scheduling conflicts with major religious observances.

Public prayers are outlawed outside of volunteer worship services, but nonsectarian prayers are allowed during “non-routine military ceremonies and events of special importance.”

Resnicoff said the guidelines would be incorporated in all training of soldiers at the Air Force, and he expects changes to be seen imminently.

Already, he said, time has been set aside on Fridays and Saturdays for religious services. Previously, services were scheduled only on Sundays, and Jews and others had to seek special permission to attend services on other days.

Mikey Weinstein, an Air Force veteran

who has two children in the service, said he believes the guidelines contain “very nice language” but would do little to end religious hostilities at the academy — which his son attends — and elsewhere in the service.

“They’re making this up as they go along,” Weinstein said. “They’re just pretty words that mean nothing.”

He said the Air Force Academy should call on one chaplain to recant recent comments in which the man

suggested he would still evangelize to the “unchurched.”

Marc Stern, general counsel for the American Jewish Congress, called the guidelines a “huge step forward.”

“Given the opposition the Air Force takes to any restrictions, it is even a larger step forward,” Stern said. “But there are some places where they have glossed over some problems.”

The rules also were welcomed by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and by Reps. Lois Capps (D-Calif.) and Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), who have been critical of the military on this issue.

“Obviously, the real test of these regulations will be their implementation,” Capps said. “It is absolutely critical that the Air Force leadership ensure that these regulations are well understood and strictly enforced, especially at the Air Force Academy.”

‘We give power to people in uniform to accomplish a mission; we do not give them power to change the religious beliefs of other.’

Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff

Special assistant to the Air Force Secretary

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Witnesses tell of Darfur genocide

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The man who inspired the movie “Hotel Rwanda” told Jewish leaders about the genocide in the Sudan.

Paul Rusesabagina and other witnesses to the Darfur violence spoke to more than 400 people in Washington on Monday, and called on the American people not to allow the destruction in Rwanda to be replicated in Sudan.

“We need each other to get up, to raise our voices,” Rusesabagina said.

Brian Steidle, who has photographed the Darfur genocide, said he believed the American people could stop the destruction and that the U.S. government was taking the lead, but said more needed to be done.

The event, held at the National Press Club, was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the NAACP, the local Jewish Community Relations Council and the Greater Washington Jewish Task Force on Darfur.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon: More settlements to go

Ariel Sharon said Israel could remove more West Bank settlements for peace with the Palestinians.

"Not all of today's settlements in Judea and Samaria will remain once we complete the final stage of the 'road map,' " the prime minister told Israel Channel 10 television Monday, referring to the U.S.-led peace plan.

Sharon did not specify how many settlements in the West Bank, beyond the four evacuated this month, would be torn down.

But Sharon reiterated that major West Bank settlement blocs would stay under Israel's control.

Bush presses Abbas

President Bush reiterated a call on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to crack down on terrorism.

Bush praised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for the recent Gaza withdrawal, saying Monday in an Arizona speech, "It took political courage to make that decision." He added, "And now it's going to take political courage by the Palestinians."

Israel-New Zealand ties on track

Israel and New Zealand formally restored ties that had been suspended over espionage allegations.

Israel's new ambassador, Naftali Tamir, presented his credentials in Wellington on Tuesday after Jerusalem apologized in writing on behalf of two Israelis who were jailed for passport fraud in New Zealand last year. New Zealand had suspended most diplomatic relations after it accused the men of being Mossad agents, a charge Israel neither confirmed nor denied.

"The incident is a closed chapter," Tamir said.

Bureaucrat quits amid arms spat

The director general of Israel's Defense Ministry resigned following an arms-export dispute with the United States.

Amos Yaron, a retired general, told Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz on Tuesday that he would step down next month after six years in the post.

According to security sources, the Pentagon blamed Yaron for a dispute over Israeli weapons sales to China that the United States considered a threat to its ally Taiwan.

Mofaz and his U.S. counterpart, Donald Rumsfeld, signed a fence-mending accord earlier this month.

Gaza sunbathers punished

Four Israeli female soldiers were disciplined for sunbathing during the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

The soldiers, all officer cadets, stripped to their underwear to take in some sun during a break in the evacuation of Gaza's Rafiah Yam settlement earlier this month.

Although there were no civilians around at the time, their conduct was deemed unbecoming and all four were suspended from the officer's course, the army said this week.

WORLD

London mayor faces hearing

The mayor of London will have a disciplinary hearing for comparing a Jewish journalist to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

The Adjudication Panel for England, which will conduct the hearing, could bar Ken Livingstone from office for up to five years, The Associated Press reported.

During an exchange earlier this year, the mayor asked Oliver Finegold of the London Evening Standard if he were a German war criminal, since the Daily Mail, the Standard's sister paper, supported the Nazis in the 1930s.

When Finegold told Livingstone he was Jewish, Livingstone said, "Well you might be, but actually you are just a like a concentration camp guard."

Czech police probe ex-Jewish official

Czech police launched a criminal probe against the former head of the Prague Jewish community.

The Czech News Agency reported that the complaint against Tomas Jelinek, which includes charges of breach of trust and abuse of personal data, is being investigated.

Jelinek said the case is part of a strategy to discredit him by opponents who he insists illegally pushed him out of office last November.

He and his supporters will participate in elections for the community leadership to be held this November.

NORTH AMERICA

NCJW seeks contraception decision

The National Council of Jewish Women raised concerns after the Bush administration missed a deadline to rule on the availability of emergency contraception.

The Food and Drug Administration was expected to rule by Sept. 1 on over-the-counter availability for the "morning-after" pill. "Once again, women's health has taken a backseat to ideology," NCJW President Phyllis Snyder said.

The organization estimates the medication could cut unwanted pregnancies by 50 percent, and would be especially important for victims of sexual assault.

Reform rabbi dies at 78

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, a leader of the Reform movement, died Monday at 78.

Brickner was the former spiritual leader of Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City and a long-serving member of the professional staff of the Union for Reform Judaism.

Brickner fought for equality and social justice across the globe — from the segregated American South in the 1960s to Vietnam in the early 1970s to Nicaragua in the 1980s.

He was among the first American Jews to travel to Israel at the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Reform movement said in a news release.

Jewish senator appointed in Canada

Canada's prime minister appointed a lawyer and activist in Montreal's Jewish community to the country's Senate.

Yoine Goldstein, 71, who specializes in bankruptcy, insolvency and commercial litigation, has been an active member of Montreal's Jewish community for many years and served for two years as president of Federation CJA.

The incoming president of the Montreal Jewish Community Foundation, Goldstein is on the board of governors of both the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

A longtime Liberal Party supporter, Goldstein is the latest in a string of Jewish senators appointed from Montreal, and brings the number of Jews to six in the 104-person Senate.

Hugh Segal, who served as an adviser to former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, was appointed to the Senate several weeks ago.