

IN THE NEWS
Israeli, Pakistani leaders engage in surprise talks

Israel's foreign minister held unprecedented talks with his Pakistani counterpart.

Silvan Shalom's unannounced meeting with Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri in an Istanbul hotel Thursday was the highest-level open round of talks between Israel and Pakistan, which have no diplomatic relations.

Addressing reporters after the meeting, Kasuri said his country sought to "engage" Israel politically.

Shalom described the talks as part of Israel's quest for rapprochement with the Arab and Muslim world following the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

However, after the meeting, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who is to address U.S. Jewish groups in New York soon, said that Pakistan would consider diplomatic relations with Israel only after a Palestinian state is established.

Jordan's Abdullah may travel to Israel

Jordan's King Abdullah may visit Israel.

An Israeli official said Thursday that the visit by Abdullah II, who is expected to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, could take place as early as next week.

Israel offers hurricane relief

Israel offered to assist the United States in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom sent a letter Thursday to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offering assistance, and Israel's ambassador to the United States, Daniel Ayalon, has spoken to officials at the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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REMINDER: The JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, Sept. 5.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



Eric Draper/White House

President Bush looks on as Supreme Court Justice nominee John Roberts delivers remarks on the State Floor of the White House on July 19.

On eve of hearings for Roberts, Jewish groups make voices heard

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the Senate prepares for the first confirmation hearings of a Supreme Court justice in more than a decade, many lawmakers are hearing from Jewish organizations about the information they want gleaned from Judge John Roberts.

Jewish organizations from across the political spectrum recently have sent letters and met with members of the Senate Judiciary Committee ahead of hearings set to begin Sept. 6.

While few groups plan to endorse or oppose Roberts, many do want senators to ask specific questions about how Roberts would

rule on issues they care about, such as the separation of church and state.

Some groups already have staked out strong positions. The National Council of Jewish Women announced its opposition to Roberts the day he was nominated to the high court — they previously had opposed his nomination to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit — and have been meeting with committee members in their home states throughout the summer, pushing them to reject Roberts.

Conversely, the Conservative movement declared Roberts "qualified" for office earlier this month, believing he "eschews an ideologically defined approach to judicial in-

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ Jewish groups weigh in as Roberts' Supreme Court nomination hearings near

Continued from page 1

terpretation and shows a balanced respect for foundational documents and societal realities."

Roberts' confirmation is likely, barring any unforeseen developments, but Jewish groups are hoping strong questioning could help elucidate his views and draw more attention to their issues. A thorough confirmation process for Roberts also could set a precedent for other nominees in coming years.

"There is a very important role to play for organizations that are not opposing him to continue to press for comprehensive hearings and questions and answers that will shed light on our concerns," said Mark Pelavin, the associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Many Jewish groups say they want a better understanding of Roberts' judicial philosophy.

Since his nomination was announced in July, papers and memos that Roberts has written have come out slowly, offering contradictory views of the man. Roberts took a strict conservative approach on many occasions, but he also had more moderate moments, such as working in 1986 to help overturn Colorado's anti-gay constitutional amendment.

"Without asking Judge Roberts to comment on any pending cases, the committee can and should seek his views on the Supreme Court's role in interpreting the United States Constitution and laws to guarantee and protect fundamental

individual rights and civil liberties," Barbara Balser, the chairwoman of the Anti-Defamation League, and Abraham Foxman, the group's national president, wrote last week to Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the committee's ranking minority member.

The six-page letter lays out five areas where Roberts should be asked to clearly enunciate his views — government and religion; civil rights and civil liberties; federalism; judicial philosophy; reproductive rights and the right to privacy.

In the letter, which focuses at length on government and religion, the authors say the ADL is uncomfortable with Roberts' suggestion in an amicus brief that the court should abandon the accepted test for determining the legality of religion in the public square, and they recommend that committee members question Roberts about it.

In recent weeks, papers from Roberts' work in the Reagan and first Bush administrations have given some insight into his views on the separation of church and state. While working at the Justice Department in 1985, for example, he backed a moment of silent prayer in public schools.

The Orthodox Union sent a letter Monday to Specter and Leahy stressing that Roberts' views on the separation of church and state are not out of the mainstream, as some liberal groups have suggested. The Orthodox Union often parts company with other Jewish groups, believing in a stronger government role in religion.

The Orthodox Union said it believes Roberts' record is being distorted: They cite his push for religious inclusion in a speech by President Reagan to a Dallas prayer breakfast in 1984, when Roberts urged the president to change the term "the church" to "religion."

"While there is more to be learned about Judge Roberts' views on matters of religion and state, calling for his rejection based upon these assertions is wrong," wrote Nathan Diament, director of the

O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs, and Mark Bane, the institute's chairman.

The American Jewish Committee plans to offer a similar letter next week, laying out its areas of focus.

None of those groups is expected to endorse or oppose Roberts.

The Reform movement, however, is considering opposing Roberts, and will be watching the hearings to get a better sense of his thought process.

"The more we've learned, the more concerns we have," Pelavin said. "A lot of the material that has come out raises very significant questions."

Pelavin said the memos Roberts authored during his government work show he has strong views on many contentious issues.

Mark Waldman, director of public policy for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said his organization focused on Roberts' credentials in deeming him qualified for the high court, but said the move was not a specific endorsement.

"We really wanted to address where we can make a specific contribution and be a unique voice," Waldman said. "If we just talked about Issue A or Issue B, what difference is there between us and any other organization that is talking about Issue A or Issue B?"

NCJW is the only major Jewish group to oppose Roberts. The organization held a news conference on the nomination in Crawford, Texas — President Bush's vacation home — and NCJW members from around the country have met with members of the judiciary committee during the congressional recess.

"Everything that has come out subsequently has bolstered our position," said Sammie Moshenberg, the NCJW's Washington director. "We certainly know enough now to say this is not someone who should have a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court."

Pelavin said it would be a mistake to believe Roberts' confirmation is a fait accompli. He said it is predictable that discussion of Roberts would cool during the summer months, but believes the focus on Roberts, and the questions for him, will return after Labor Day.

A Supreme Court nominee's record is scrutinized for his views on Jewish issues.

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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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Playing softball in the mame-loshn

By ELLEN CASSEDDY

COPAKE, N.Y. (JTA) — The sun is peeking over the hills and a silvery mist is rising off the lake. Dishes clatter in the dining hall and a shorts-clad group is setting off for a walk in the woods.

It's a typical morning at a typical mountain resort — with one difference.

Here at the Berkshire Hills Emanuel Adult Vacation Center near Albany, N.Y., it's Yiddish Vokh, or Yiddish Week. Every activity, from morning calisthenics to volleyball to roasting marshmallows under the stars, takes place entirely in the mame-loshn, or mother tongue.

Every August, Yiddish-lovers head for these spacious lakeside lawns with one goal in mind: to spend seven days in Yiddish land. The event's 29th season, which ended Tuesday, drew more than 150 participants from New York, Baltimore, Washington, Los Angeles, Boston, New Jersey, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Denver — as well as Australia, Brazil, Canada and Israel.

At the registration desk, participants collected packets containing pages and pages of sports and leisure terms in Yiddish. Then they put on their Yiddish nametags: Mike became Motl, Jeffrey turned into Itsik-Leyb, Cecile became Tsirl and Peggy was now Chaye.

For most Jews today, the 1,000-year-old Germanic tongue written in Hebrew letters has all but vanished from daily life. But at Yiddish Vokh, America's only weeklong all-Yiddish retreat, it's everywhere.

Little children play katchke, katchke, ganz — duck, duck, goose — on the lawn, while their older siblings compete in a scavenger hunt. Elderly couples shmooze in lawn chairs under the trees, and a dozen women perform vigorous shpringendike yankelekh, or jumping jacks, in the pool.

Rowboats glide on the glassy surface of the lake, and the hilke-pilke field fills up with klappers (batters), khappers (catchers) and feldnikes (fielders) playing softball.

Meanwhile, inside the red clapboard buildings, native speakers offer classes to help the grine, or greenhorns, with vocabulary, reading and writing. There's a writers' group and a leynkrazz, or reading circle, origami and calligraphy, a discussion of God and a presentation on how to preserve family archives.

The activities go on late into the night. One evening featured the work of the classic Yiddish writer I.L. Peretz, followed by a shrek-mayse, or ghost story, with the lights turned off. On another evening, participants acted out a raunchy parody of "Saturday Night Live."

The New York Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus sang, and there were films and a klezmer band. On the last night, a homegrown talent show was a shlagger, or big hit.

Ben "Binyumen" Schaechter, a 41-year-old pianist and composer, has directed Yiddish Vokh since 1993. The son of a renowned Yiddish linguist, he grew up in a Yiddish-speaking enclave in the Bronx. He and his three sisters have raised their children in Yiddish.

For Schaechter, Yiddish Vokh is no sentimental trip back to the Old World.

"Yiddish for me is not about the past," Schaechter told JTA — in Yiddish, of course. "I live it every day."

Schaechter carefully screens new applicants by phone, stressing that the retreat is designed only for those committed to the real thing — all Yiddish, all the time.

For some, the retreat is a mekhaye, a pleasure.

Myra Mniewski, 51, grew up speaking Yiddish at home with her parents, who were refugees from Hitler's Europe. Now she directs Yiddish Vokh's parent organization, Yugntruf, or "Call to Youth" (www.yugntruf.org), and speaks Yiddish at home with her partner.

"It's the language itself that draws me," she said. "Here I pick up idiomatic expressions that I can take home and use in daily life."

For those still striving to master the language, the week can be a struggle.

Retreat leaders devote considerable energy to updating Yiddish, coining new words that bubbe never knew from. Cell phones — which don't actually function on the Yiddish Vokh campus — are mobilkes or tselkes. Basketball

is netsbol, e-mail is blitz-post and flip-flops are finger-shikh, or toe-shoes.

Hanging on to the language of the shtetl, much less trying to drag it into the 21st century, may seem hopeless or silly to some. But for Yiddish Vokh-niks, it's a dead-serious matter.

"Hitler and Stalin wiped out the old Jewish communities," said Mark "Meyer" David, a computer programmer from Boston who hosts "The Yiddish Voice" radio program.

"Only the language is left," he said. "Yiddish puts me in touch with an exterminated culture."

Before the Holocaust, 11 million people spoke Yiddish. Today it's estimated that between 500,000 and 2 million people use the language, notably in fervently Orthodox communities — although the language enjoyed a mini-revival among younger, less observant Jews during the 1990s.

Anne Eakin Moss, 32, is not observant, but said Yiddish gives her and her family a secular connection to Jewish identity.

Moss and her husband speak only Yiddish with their son Isaac, age two. They come to Yiddish Vokh every year in order to meet other families with Yiddish-speaking children.

Some of Moss' friends warned that being raised in a Yiddish-speaking home in English-speaking Baltimore would confuse Isaac, but Moss felt just the opposite: Bilingualism is good for the brain, she believes.

"He's ahead of many kids his age," she says.

Coining terms that bubbe never knew from.

FOCUS
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ISSUES



Ellen Cassedy

Ben "Binyumen" Schaechter, center, director of Yiddish Vokh, and other participants get ready to play softball at the Berkshire Mountains near Albany, N.Y.

Jewish unionites fight Israel divestment

By PENNY SCHWARTZ

BOSTON (JTA) — Ties between American Jews and the U.S. labor movement have deep historical roots — and a local Jewish labor leader is playing a key role in keeping them strong.

David Borrus, a union organizer and the co-chairman of the New England region of the Jewish Labor Committee, was the go-to guy when the Boston Jewish community needed the support of local labor unions to fight a recent campaign in the suburb of Somerville to force the city's municipal retirement funds to divest their holdings in Israel Bonds.

The fact that union organizers stood at a public meeting "behind Israel's consul general to New England delivered a message to aldermen that this issue was not only important to Israel but to their own constituents," said Alan Ronkin, the deputy director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston.

That particular divestment effort was defeated, but the larger battle is ongoing: Divestment proponents renewed their efforts to put the issue on a Somerville city ballot later this year.

"I don't think there has been greater proof in recent memory of why our community needs the Jewish Labor Committee," said Ethan Felson, the assistant executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, who has been active in the divestment fight. "They've been heroic in

this divestment battle."

Fighting divestment is part of the labor movement's belief that more investment, not less, will help ease the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"The union's view is that the worst thing for peace and for workers is divestment and isolation," says Phillip Fishman, the AFL-CIO's assistant director for international affairs and the labor movement's point person on the divestment issue for the past decade.

Campaigns to fend off divestment efforts in Mas-

sachusetts, San Francisco and Milwaukee shed light on the historic relationship between Jews and organized labor. Jews were a vital part of the labor movement during the early- and mid-20th century,

when the movement was one of the strongest political forces in the United States.

Founded in 1934 by Yiddish immigrant trade unionists to fight the rise of Nazism in Germany, the Jewish Labor Committee has regional offices in six cities around the country, with affiliated groups in others.

The committee's Holocaust-education program, which boasts 800 graduates, is one of the organization's most successful initiatives, according to Avram Lyon, the committee's executive director. Another

is the group's Passover labor seders, which take place in cities across the country, bringing together union members, labor leaders and members of the Jewish community.

The Jewish Labor Committee's board of directors is made up of some of the most influential labor leaders in the country, including Morton Bahr, the recently retired president of the Communications Workers of America, and Andrew Stern, the president of the

Service Employees International Union.

Stern sent shock waves through the labor movement earlier this summer when he led a bitter revolt in the AFL-CIO and pulled his 1.3-million member union out of the labor federation. His move was followed by several other unions. In separate conversations after the AFL-CIO convention in Chicago, Lyon, Bahr and Stern all agreed that the split will not affect the workings of the Jewish Labor Committee, which is not taking sides in the issue.

In a phone conversation from his office in New York City, Lyon described one of the projects he's involved in.

In June, Lyon met with executives of Mudd Jeans to relay the committee's concerns about tactics being used by one of the company's Mexican manufacturing contractors, who Lyon says are thwarting a union drive by workers. Copies of a follow-up letter were sent to hundreds of rabbis across the country.

"We had a response from Mudd's lawyers within 72 hours," Lyon recalls. The company agreed to exert its influence to force its Mexican contractor to conduct a free and fair union election for workers.

As of now, however, the contractor has postponed the election.

Today's Jewish labor activists say there are two fundamental connections between their Jewish values and the labor movement: One is that organized labor has been a longtime supporter of Israel, and the other is social justice.

The ties between Israel and the American labor movement date from the formation of the Histadrut trade union federation, even before the founding of the State

LABOR DAY FEATURE

The Jewish Labor Committee has been 'heroic in this divestment battle.'
Ethan Felson
Jewish Council for Public Affairs



Penny Schwartz

"Support Peace, Reject Divestment," was the message delivered by union members of Boston's Building Trades Union who held a banner in Somerville's Davis Square on Aug. 9.

of Israel, notes Bahr, who serves as the treasurer of the Jewish Labor Committee.

"It's no accident that labor remains pro-Israel," Felson says. It reflects "a lot of work over lots of years, and it should be celebrated."

While the U.S. labor movement is not as powerful as it once was, he noted, labor has "tremendous political influence in many segments, and we shouldn't take it for granted."

The economist Barry Bluestone, who directs Northeastern University's Center for Urban and Regional Policy and has written extensively on American labor and the economy, attributes the historic ties between organized labor and Israel to labor's long-standing affinity for progressive causes. He cites as an example the friendship between the United Auto Workers' founder, Walter Reuther, and former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. At one time, Bluestone says, the UAW was perhaps the largest institutional purchaser of Israel Bonds.

Bluestone grew up in a union-centered family: His father, Irving Bluestone, with whom he co-wrote the book "Negotiating the Future," was a vice president of the UAW, which has very few Jewish members, Bluestone noted. His mother, also a union member, worked in apparel shops on New York City's Lower East Side.

"Historically, there's always been a disproportionate number of Jews in progressive movements," the element of his heritage that makes Bluestone proudest.

But several things have happened, Bluestone observes: The progressive movement and unions are very weak; Jews are not as prominent in the trade union movement as in earlier decades; and the unions in which Jews were most active, such as those in the retail trade, have seen their membership numbers decline steeply since the mid-20th century.

The exception, Bluestone observes, is in the public sector, specifically the teachers' unions, where there are a large number of Jewish professionals.

For the labor attorney Don Siegel, the connection is deeply personal.

"It's the way I stay whole," Siegel said. "I'm Jewish, I pray, go to services and I'm labor. I believe in both. It's destabilizing on a personal level to have tension between the two communities. There's a deep connection between the principles of our faith and the labor movement. Fair treatment for working people and decent standards for compensation — those are bedrocks." ■

Helping the working poor

By SIMON GREER

NEW YORK (JTA) — This Labor Day, you'll probably read about the troubles facing unions in America.

The recent split, in which several of the country's larger unions left the AFL-CIO, will dominate the headlines. It's being hailed by some as the movement's last best hope, and criticized by others as an untenable fracturing of a movement in need of solidarity.

Rarely do these discussions shed light on the lives of American workers, particularly low wage workers, who could benefit most from a strong labor movement.

The existence of the working poor is a stinging rebuke to those who blame poverty on the impoverished. The fact that most poor Americans are employed is clear evidence that the system is flawed.

Low-skilled jobs often pay poverty wages. It's a consequence of the marketplace, poor government regulation and the unequal bargaining power between workers and management.

But it's neither inevitable nor desirable.

A janitor in a commercial building in Texas cleans the floors, takes out the garbage, maintains the restrooms and does minor maintenance tasks. A janitor in a commercial building in New York performs the same tasks.

The janitor in Texas is poor and lacks private health insurance. She works three jobs and still needs public subsidies to make ends meet.

The janitor in New York is middle class, with quality employer-sponsored health insurance. She takes her family on vacation to Disney World every year.

The difference? The janitor in New York belongs to a union.

When learned Jews discuss tzedakah — or charity — and poverty, they inevitably reference Maimonides' eight levels of tze-

dakah, taken from the Mishneh Torah. The highest level involves helping a person to become self-sufficient, possibly by giving him a job or a loan to start a business. In popular parlance: "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach a man to fish and he eats for life."

Maimonides' formulation posits that employment equals self-sufficiency. This presumes that people who work can live off of their earnings.

In the United States, 7.4 million working Americans earn less than the federal poverty level. Three out of five of these men and women work full time. Sixty-five percent of poor families include at least one working parent.

The numbers look even worse considering that the federal poverty level in 2004 was set at \$15,670 per year for a family of three. Millions of workers who earn over the official poverty line remain impoverished, if not officially poor.

So how can we fulfill the eighth level of tzedakah for the working poor? We can build a society that creates the conditions in which employment enables workers to achieve self-sufficiency.

Today, there are few public programs to help poor workers become economically self-sufficient.

Education and training can help. So does the earned income tax credit. The minimum wage helps. A living wage helps even more.

But enabling workers to bargain collectively with their employers provides the best model of self-sufficiency.

This Labor Day, let us give thanks to unions for creating the weekend and ending child labor in the United States. But let us continue to see them as a vehicle through which to fulfill our obligation to engage in tzedakah at the highest level. ■

(Simon Greer is executive director of the Jewish Fund for Justice.)

OP-ED

Amos Oz wins German award

BERLIN (JTA) — Israeli writer Amos Oz has been awarded the Goethe Prize in Frankfurt.

On Sunday, Mayor Petra Roth lauded Oz for his literary accomplishments and his support of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

In his acceptance speech, Oz called the removal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip a "painful step in the right direction" and advised Germans to avoid their tendency to view Palestinians as victims and Israelis as perpetrators. ■

Jewish woman helps Mexican migrants

By LARRY LUXNER

TUCSON (JTA) — Shanti Sellz says she never meant to be a troublemaker.

A college student just back from a seven-month biological research project in Ecuador, Sellz, 23, was driving the back roads of southern Arizona on July 9 looking for Mexican migrants in distress when she and a friend stopped to help a family suffering from dehydration.

"I still remember very clearly this family: a man and a woman with two older teenagers, walking along the side of the road," Sellz told JTA.

The migrants were ill and had severe blisters; one was vomiting. After consulting two doctors and a nurse via satellite phone, Sellz was advised to take the Mexicans to a clinic in Tucson for emergency medical treatment.

But they never made it.

U.S. Border Patrol officers stopped her car and arrested Sellz and her companion, Daniel Strauss, also 23. Their car was confiscated, and the two were charged with one felony count of transporting an undocumented person and one felony count of obstruction of justice.

Just four days later, the Border Patrol offered to drop the two federal charges if Sellz and Strauss would agree to enter a "diversion program" including admission of guilt and probation for one year. They refused the plea bargain.

"Humanitarian work needs to be applauded, not prosecuted," Strauss told reporters at a recent press conference. "Shanti and I are not accepting this plea because we committed no crime."

According to news reports, Border Patrol officials said the men in the truck weren't ill and refused medical attention once in custody.

A trial is set for Oct. 4 at the federal courthouse in Tucson. In recent weeks, more than 100 activists with the local group "No More Deaths" have demonstrated in support of Sellz and Strauss and against immigration laws that make it illegal to bring undocumented migrants to a hospital or clinic, even if they're in obvious medical danger.

"I was not expecting to be arrested," Sellz said. "I still think, what if this was me on the side of the road? I hope to God anybody would do the same for me."

The prospect of being holed up in a

hot Arizona jail is a long way from Iowa City, where Sellz celebrated her Bat Mitzvah and was involved in the local Jewish community.

"My parents are very proud of me," she told JTA at a remote desert camp run by No More Deaths, located off a dirt road near the town of Aravaca, south of Tucson.

The camp consists of little more than a trailer with a green tent, cots, blankets, first-aid equipment, water and food. A white flag flies from the top of a pole, making the camp visible for miles, and it's under constant surveillance by Border Patrol agents watching from their vehicles on a nearby hill.

From here, Sellz and a dozen or so other volunteers fan out every morning during the hot summer, in pickup trucks and on foot, looking for Mexican migrants who need help.

So far this year, 229 such migrants have died in Arizona. Last year, some 200 men, women and children died in Arizona trying to make the trek north.

The reason for the sudden jump in deaths, immigration activists say, is that the U.S. government has instituted an aggressive policy that has forced migrants who might otherwise have crossed through urban areas like Nogales, Ariz.; El Paso, Texas; and San Diego to cross through the dangerous deserts of the Southwest.

Since that blockade strategy began in 1995 with Operation Hold the Line, some 2,600 people have lost their lives attempting to cross the desert.

"The deaths of these migrants is a direct result of that strategy," claimed John Fife, one of Sellz's most outspoken supporters.

But Jose Garza, spokesman for the Border Patrol, told the Dallas Morning News that No More Deaths goes beyond humanitarian aid and may itself be putting more lives at risk.

"Smugglers are using these groups to lure illegal immigrants, saying 'Americans put food and water out there,'" he said. "It gives a false sense of security."

Rob Daniels, spokesman for the Border Patrol in Tucson, told JTA: "It is against the law to transport illegal aliens if it is furthering their illegal entry into the United States, no different than if a smuggler were bringing them north. It's pretty much viewed the same by law enforcement."

Daniels said that in the case of Sellz and Strauss, "they spoke in detail" with the

Mexicans and knew they were in the United States illegally. "That is specifically why they're set up in the desert."

Daniels added: "The law is very clear as to what private citizens and humanitarian groups can and cannot do. We have had dialogue with these

groups, which I have sat in on. They are told by Border Patrol personnel that it is not permissible for them to do what these two individuals did."

During the 1980s, Fife — a retired Presbyterian minister and co-founder of No More Deaths — was convicted for helping Central American war refugees enter the United States illegally.

"In the face of people's human rights being violated by government policy, the government has chosen to try to criminalize people saving lives and providing humanitarian aid," he said. "I have every confidence this case will work to hasten immigration reform on the border."

A day before she was arrested, Sellz had been trying to help a family find the remains of their lost daughter in the desert.

"We have Samaritan laws in Arizona that make it illegal to not stop to help someone in need," she said, adding that No More Deaths follows an established protocol for dealing with migrants.

Bill Walker and Jeff Rogers, lawyers representing Sellz and Strauss, claim that transporting undocumented migrants who are in immediate need of medical attention does not violate federal law.

Regardless of the legal nuances, Sellz said she feels "very comfortable about the case" and wants to put the trial behind her so she can pursue a major in sustainable community development at San Juan College in Farmington, N.M.

Even though she's not a particularly observant Jew, Sellz said, she likes the faith-based principles that drive No More Deaths.

"I know the world is unjust, but this is happening in my own backyard," she said. "It pains me to know that these migrants are having to leave their homes, only to be met with such hatred and discrimination." ■

Running afoul
of the U.S.
Border Patrol in
the Arizona desert.

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

Israel's top doubles tennis team builds pride

By HOWARD BLAS

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (JTA) — Israel's best ambassadors are personable, passionate and proud of their country.

It doesn't hurt that they're world-class tennis players.

Andy Ram, 25, and Jonathan "Yoni" Erlich, 28, close friends since their teen years and doubles partners for the past three years, have been traveling around the world together, entertaining crowds and sharing their love for Israel.

Ram, ranked 24th in the world for mens doubles, and Erlich, ranked 22nd, are the No. 11 seeds in the men's doubles draw of the U.S. Open tennis tournament. Each was entered in the mixed-doubles draw as well.

The past year has been successful but somewhat bittersweet for Ram and Erlich: Representing Israel in the 2004 Olympics in Athens last summer, they advanced to the quarterfinals before losing to Germans Nicolas Kiefer and Rainer

Schuettler, who went on to take the silver medal.

In October, Ram and Erlich won the Grand Prix de Tennis de Lyon, in France, and hoped for success in the Australian Open in January. But they lost a heart-breaking third-round match to No. 2 seeds Bob and Mike Bryan, twins from the United States.

In February they won the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Pleased with their fourth career title, Ram and Erlich geared up for May's French Open, but Ram received bad news two days before the tournament — his 60-year-old father had died of a heart attack.

The duo dropped out of the tournament and returned to Israel, where shiva was observed in Ram's mother's home in Jerusalem.

Ram speaks warmly about his family, who moved from Uruguay to Israel when Andy was 5.

"I still have grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in Uruguay," he says. "I love when they come to Israel to see us."

Ram grew up in Jerusalem and at age 14 was invited to study at the Wingate Institute, Israel's National Center for Physical Education and Sport, near Netanya. Ram stayed at Wingate until age 18, when he entered the Israeli army.

"They treated me and the other athletes like special sportsmen, and we were allowed to play tennis and travel, even during our army service," he says.

Ram enjoys the company of other Israeli players on tour, such as Harel Levy, Noam Okun and Amir Haddad.

"I've never had a problem" on the tour "being Jewish or Israeli," Ram says.

Both Ram and Erlich enjoy the reception they receive from Jewish communities around the world.

"We always receive a warm welcome

— people are supportive and fly flags of Israel everywhere we go," Erlich says.

The team is a model of good communication: While Ram and Erlich shout on-court commands to each other in Hebrew, they both grew up in bilingual Hebrew-Spanish homes and also are comfortable in English.

Erlich was born in Buenos Aires and moved to Israel when he was 1. He grew up in Haifa and moved to the Wingate Institute at age 15.

In mid-June, Ram and Erlich won the Nottingham Open in England, considered the major warm-up to Wimbledon. They entered Wimbledon seeded 15th, advancing to the third round before losing again to the Bryans.

The pair spent July playing with the St. Louis Aces of the World Team Tennis league. Dani Apte,

the team's general manager, praised Erlich as a "fantastic mentor" to a younger team member, adding that he "kept the team level and focused in each of his matches."

Ram "directed his passion and became the drive that motivated the whole team to win," Apte said.

In late July, the Israeli duo finally beat the Bryan twins at the Mercedes-Benz Cup in Los Angeles, before losing in the finals. They also lost in the finals of a Masters Series event in Montreal in August.

In an interview with JTA just before the U.S. Open, Ram and Erlich spoke about tennis, their families and about being far from Israel during the recent Gaza withdrawal.

"It was tough seeing those pictures," Ram said. "I don't take a political side — I'm only afraid that my sister, in the army, might be taken to a dangerous place."

"It was very difficult seeing such horrible pictures on TV," Erlich agreed. "The truth is, it's a big relief for me not to be in Israel at this time."

ARTS & CULTURE

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS

■ Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, was named president of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations. Rabbi Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, was re-elected as IJIC's chairman.

■ Nancy Lewitt was appointed coordinator of student services at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/ Jerusalem.

■ Money manager and political adviser Jeffrey Wiesenfeld was named chairman of the board of the Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre.

HONORS

■ Michael Schneider, former executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was named Chevalier of the League of Honor by French President Jacques Chirac.

■ Actor and political activist Ed Asner received American ORT's Tikkun Olam Award.

■ The "Gesicht zeigen" initiative was awarded the German Cooperation Council of the Associations of Christian-Jewish Cooperation's Buber Rosenzweig Medal for its efforts against anti-Semitism and racism.



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Indictments made in L.A. terror plot

Four people were indicted in an alleged plot against targets in Los Angeles, including the Israeli Consulate and two synagogues.

The men were indicted Wednesday for allegedly being part of a plot to wage war against the U.S. government.

One of the men is believed to be the head of a radical Islamic gang based at a California prison.

Group wants Gaza synagogues left intact

The Orthodox Union called on Israel's Supreme Court to prevent synagogues in the evacuated Gaza Strip from being razed.

Destroying the synagogues would go against Jewish law and "set a terrible precedent with regard to Jewish communities around the world," the group said in a letter to the court.

The court will rule on the issue Sunday.

Israeli officials are worried that if the synagogues are left intact the Palestinians will ransack them, but moving them could be difficult logistically.

Calif. county sorry for Rosh Hashanah election

A California county apologized for scheduling its congressional election primary on Rosh Hashanah.

Orange County will offer early voting beginning Sept. 25 at several synagogues in the county.

Local Jewish leaders applauded the move, but said they also support a bill to move the election to Oct. 11.

Voters in the 48th Congressional District will choose a successor to Rep. Christopher Cox, a Republican.

Chasidic Jew to head law school

Rabbi Aaron Twerski, named dean of the Hofstra University law School, is believed to be the first Chasidic Jew to head a U.S. law school.

The New York Daily News reported this week on the appointment of Twerski, an expert in tort law.

"I've always had a love for tort law that may have been spurred by my background in talmudic law," he said.

Twerski is an ordained rabbi, but does not practice.

MIDDLE EAST

Gaza hand-over sealed

Israel signed an accord giving Egypt security control over the Gaza Strip's southern border.

Following Thursday's signing ceremony in Cairo, attended by the Israeli army's chief of operations, Gen. Yisrael Ziv, 750 Egyptian troops are to be posted along the 8-mile-long frontier in coming days.

Israel's Cabinet and Knesset approved the hand-over earlier in the week.

Grave transfer completed

The exhumation of settlers from a Gaza Strip cemetery and their reburial in Israel were completed.

In a ceremony attended by 10,000 mourners and settler sympathizers, 15 bodies were removed from the Gush Katif cemetery Thursday and driven by cavalcade to their final rest on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

The operation brought to a close the transfer of all 48 bodies from the only Jewish cemetery in Gaza.

Sharon looks forward

Ariel Sharon urged Israelis to put the difficulties of the Gaza Strip withdrawal behind them.

"We have just undergone a difficult period, involving actions that

were important for the State of Israel.

"But these actions also cause pain and suffering," the Israeli prime minister said in a speech Thursday, referring to 9,000 settlers evacuated from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

"We need to overcome this issue and look forward to the day after," he said.

Rubble deal sealed

The United Nations will help Israel and the Palestinian Authority dispose of rubble from razed Gaza Strip settlements.

Israeli sources said Thursday that the United Nations Development Program had agreed to oversee the transfer of a fifth of the waste produced from razing the 21 settlements to the Sinai Desert in Egypt, where it will be buried at Israel's expense.

The rest of the rubble will be recycled for new construction in Gaza on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

Ma'ariv said that Egypt had insisted on U.N. involvement in the project, as it suspected that Israel otherwise might bury toxic waste in the Sinai.

Officials had no comment on the report.

Bomb suspect attempts suicide

A suspected Jewish terrorist attempted suicide in Israeli police custody.

Eliran Golan, who is accused of planting bombs intended for Israeli Arabs in the northern city of Haifa last year, tried to hang himself in his jail cell Thursday.

He was hospitalized in critical condition.

Eliran's lawyer had argued unsuccessfully that his client was psychologically impaired and unfit to stand trial.

WORLD

Rome celebrates Israel fest

Rome is celebrating a "Week with Israel" festival.

The festival, which runs through Sunday, features concerts, live performances and other events aimed at demonstrating solidarity with the families of victims of terrorism and manifesting support for dialogue and peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The initiative is organized by the Rome Jewish community, the Friends of Israel Association and other groups.

Belgian Jewish schools won't teach sex-ed

A Jewish school in Belgium recently lost government recognition because it refuses to teach the required sexual education curriculum.

Five other schools are negotiating their status with the Department of Education over the issue.

Losing their status as recognized schools would entail a loss not only of subsidies, but also the schools' capacity to award state-recognized diplomas.

Mordechai Stauber, principal of the Satmar Bais Rachel primary school in Antwerp, which lost its recognition, said, "The standards for sexual education are incompatible with Jewish beliefs."

Macedonia breaks ground on Holocaust center

Three days of Holocaust commemoration in Macedonia will culminate in a groundbreaking for a new Holocaust Memorial Center in Skopje.

The cornerstone for the center, located in the capital's former Jewish quarter, will be laid on Friday morning.

The center will include a Holocaust museum and space for cultural initiatives.

Events Wednesday and Thursday include an exhibition on the Holocaust in Macedonia, a conference on Holocaust memorials and a meeting between Macedonia's prime minister, Vlado Buckovski, and Jewish leaders.