

IN THE NEWS

Palestinians torch Gaza Strip synagogues

Palestinian rioters torched several synagogues in evacuated Gaza Strip settlements.

The Palestinian Authority said it was powerless to stop Monday's desecrations by mobs that rushed into settlements after Israeli ground forces quit Gaza. [Story, Pg. 3]

President Bush to visit synagogue

President Bush will make his first visit to an American synagogue as the nation's leader.

Bush is expected to tour the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington on Wednesday, before speaking at a dinner commemorating the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America.

Bush will tour the synagogue and view a Torah rescued from the Dachau concentration camp, White House officials told JTA.

Russian city gets new JCC

Jews in St. Petersburg, Russia, marked the dedication of a new Jewish community center. Yesod, a modern stone-and-glass building situated in downtown St. Petersburg, is a project of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The center, dedicated last Friday, will house Jewish organizations that until now have rented office space in various parts of the city.

The center will house the offices of the Hased Avraham welfare center, the Adain Lo educational network, Hillel and the Petersburg Institute of Jewish Studies.

It also will contain a large auditorium for conferences and cultural performances, a Jewish library, a winter garden and a fitness center.

Major supporters include the Claims Conference, the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

WORLD REPORT

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

Houston-area Jewish day schools teaching young Katrina evacuees

By MICHAEL C. DUKE

HOUSTON (JTA) — In New Orleans, Dr. David and Michelle Oelsner's three sons attended a nonsectarian private school.

But now that the family has evacuated to Houston, Josh, Andrew and Oliver will be attending Jewish day schools.

"We were offered three spots" at a Houston-area private school, "but instead we decided that it would be in our sons' best interests to send them to a Jewish day school," David Oelsner said.

The Oelsners are not alone. Many Jewish evacuees from the Gulf Coast region, facing the reality that their return to New Orleans is at least six months away, are now sending their children to day schools in Houston.

In order to make the evacuees' transition to life in Houston as manageable as possible, Jewish schools in the area have opened their doors to every family that fled the Gulf Coast region — both Jewish and non-Jewish.

So far, nearly 90 new Jewish students have enrolled in Houston's five major day schools — Robert M. Beren Academy, Torah Day School, Beth Yeshurun Day School, the Shlenker School and the Emery/Weiner School — as well as several congregational preschools and early childhood development programs.

According to Elaine Kellerman, the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston's Bureau of Jewish Education, these numbers are expected to rise in weeks to come.

"As more Jewish families who evacuated their homes due to Hurricane Katrina settle in Houston to be closer to family and

friends or because of employment opportunities, we will likely see an even greater increase in the number of new students at our day schools," Kellerman said. "It's hard to estimate how many new students we will actually absorb week after week, because we are still in the process of determining how many Jewish children there were in the Greater New Orleans area to begin with," she noted.

All five heads of Houston's Jewish day schools say they will do everything they can to help students adjust to their new lives.

The schools' work was made easier when the Avi Chai Foundation, which supports Jewish educational initiatives in the United States and Israel, said they would be sending emergency grant money to day schools that absorbed children from the evacuation. Fifteen-hundred dollars will be earmarked for each student per semester for the Jewish day school he or she attends in Houston, Kellerman noted, with the money going toward books, supplies and hiring of additional teachers and school staff.

In contrast to the day schools, not many Jewish children from New Orleans have enrolled in Houston's various religious and Hebrew school programs, Kellerman said.

Kellerman pointed out, however, that there have been a few students who have looked seriously into local religious schools, particularly those who will celebrate their bar and bat mitzvahs in the coming year.

Sherri and Matt Tarr's daughter, Kayla, now is a third-grader at the Shlenker School; their son, Josh, now attends the seventh grade at the Emery/Weiner School, which

Continued on page 2

■ *Houston-area Jewish day schools host young Katrina evacuees*

Continued from page 1

absorbed 36 new students in the period immediately following the hurricane, the most of any day school in Houston.

The Tarrs evacuated their Metairie, La., home the Saturday before the levees were breached; they spent time in Jackson, Miss.; Birmingham, Ala.; and Orlando, Fla., before settling in Houston.

The family left their 15-year-old cat behind when they evacuated their home. But Matt Tarr succeeded in rescuing Pumpkin, on Sept. 7, and brought her back to Houston.

Having surveyed the damage done to their home by Hurricane Katrina, Tarr said there was three feet of mold creeping up the interior walls and that two trees had crushed the roof.

Before Hurricane Katrina, the Tarrs' children had attended the New Orleans Jewish Day School.

After their first week in the Houston school, Josh and Kayla said they feel very comfortable in their new surroundings. Both pointed out that their homework loads are a bit heavier in Houston, but everything else has been similar to their school experience in New Orleans.

They said their teachers and class-

mates have been very caring and welcoming, which has made them feel that they belong and are accepted by all.

In contrast, another new student at the Emery/Weiner School, Mica Loewy, the daughter of Lynn and Rabbi Robert Loewy of Temple Gates of Prayer in Metairie, La., has had a difficult time orienting herself to the post-Katrina world. She and her parents said they

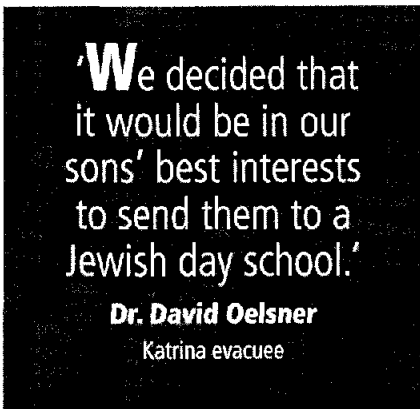
are very grateful for all that the school and Houston community have done for

them but the transition continues to be an agonizing affair.

"Like so many kids her age, Mica was totally unprepared for what has become a painful reality," Lynn explained carefully, not wanting to belittle the generous outpouring of support their family has received from the Houston community over the past two weeks.

"Our daughter's comfortable life has been completely interrupted: She lost a school she had just fallen in love with, and she is utterly devastated by the fact that her two best girlfriends are in Atlanta and Memphis and might never return home.

"She misses her old life, she has told us, and it's been very difficult for her to start over again. And it's been so hard for us as parents to watch her cry and not be able to make the pain go away." ■



Belgian Jewish school loses funding

By GIDON VAN EMDEN

BRUSSELS (JTA) — A Jewish school in Belgium has lost government recognition because it refuses to teach the required sexual education curriculum.

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

Losing status as a recognized school entails a loss of subsidies, as well as the schools' ability to award state-recognized diplomas.

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

The Satmar school took the decision to court, but lost. The school has applied for renewed recognition, and is negotiating with the Department of Education on the matter.

As in much of Western Europe, Jewish schools in Belgium are eligible for state funding for the costs of teaching the secular curriculum. This curriculum is set by the state, and schools that receive state recognition are mandated to teach it in order to award recognized degrees.

Universities in Belgium, many of them also state-funded, will only accept students with government-sanctioned diplomas.

The issue arose since the curricula have become increasingly detailed and controls have become more stringent.

Education policy in Belgium is carried out on the regional level, and the Flemish law on education, which applies in Antwerp, states that children who finish primary school must "be aware of their bodily functions."

Antwerp's Jewish community of around 15,000 people includes a strong fervently Orthodox community, and few liberal Jews.

As much as 90 percent of the Jewish community is estimated to attend Jewish day schools. Not all Jewish schools in Antwerp are affected by the matter, as some follow the prescribed curriculum.

Meanwhile, some community leaders claim that the state curriculum is acceptable according to Jewish law.

"Sexual education is most certainly not against Jewish beliefs. The Torah openly discusses all kinds of sexual behavior, and so do Jewish codes of law," said Henri Rosenberg, a local lawyer who teaches Torah law at Radboud University in the Netherlands.

Officials with the Consistoire, the central group for Belgian Jewry, said it would not take a stand on the issue because it concerns a secular topic, not a Jewish one. ■

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

JTA WORLD REPORT

Howard E. Friedman
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Noa Artzi-Weill
Marketing Director

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.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Synagogue razings stoke fear of Gaza chaos

By DINA KRAFT

NEVEH DEKALIM, Gaza Strip (JTA) — A blazing orange sun set over the Mediterranean as Israeli soldiers lowered the country's flag at the army's Gaza headquarters, signifying the end of an era in this sandy strip of land.

Sunday's brief ceremony, attended by top military officials and the parents of soldiers killed defending Israeli settlements in Gaza, marked the end of 38 years of Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip, a period that saw the creation — and most recently the destruction — of Jewish settlements and some of the bloodiest fighting between Israel and the Palestinians.

The three highest-ranking army commanders overseeing Gaza — the army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz; the head of the Southern Command, Maj. Gen. Dan Harel; and the head of the Gaza Command, Brig. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, faced an honor guard of soldiers and saluted them.

Together they sang Israel's national anthem, "Hatikvah," and spoke of their hopes for a better future.

"Thirty-eight years are coming to a close. The army is leaving the Gaza Strip," Kochavi said. "We leave with our heads held high. The gate that is closing after us is also a gate that is opening. We hope it will be a gate of peace and quiet, a gate of hope and goodwill."

Harel also voiced hope for a future without bloodshed.

"We are at the brink of something new. I hope the withdrawal of our troops signifies a period of peace and quiet with our neighbors," he said.

But there were reminders of the difficulties ahead.

A ceremony scheduled for earlier Sunday was canceled after the Palestinian Authority boycotted the event. That came after the Israeli Cabinet reversed a decision and voted 14-2 not to raze 25 abandoned synagogues in Gaza.

Palestinian officials reportedly were upset that the decision put them in the position of having to destroy the synagogues or protect them.

On Monday, Palestinian rioters torched several of the synagogues. The Palestinian Authority said it was powerless to stop the desecration by mobs that rushed into the settlements after Israeli forces left.

THE DISENGAGEMENT SUMMER

P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas tried to play down the sight, televised internationally, by noting that Israel had removed all ritual items from the synagogues before withdrawing. But Israeli officials suggest the violence and vandalism do not bode well for future relations.

"The desecration of synagogues is the barbaric act of a people that has no respect for sacred sites," Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said.

Pointing to the Cabinet vote, Abbas accused Israel of wanting the world to see Palestinians desecrating the synagogues.

"This is a trap the Israelis are trying to set for the P.A.," he said. "They will use this to present Palestinians as uncivilized."

The Palestinians further contend that the occupation is not over, citing Israel's continued control over which people and goods are allowed in and out of the coastal strip.

For now, Israel will continue to control Gaza's borders and airspace, citing security concerns.

Shortly before the Israeli ceremony began, an exchange of gunfire between Israeli soldiers and what appeared to be Palestinian snipers was heard as several hundred children from the neighboring Palestinian town of Khan Yunis tried to break down the fence that led to the military command post.

Earlier Sunday, army bulldozers smoothed a pathway between sand dunes

where an electronic security fence was being completed along the border between Israel and Gaza.

Elsewhere, cranes gathered scrap metal and soldiers burned refuse from the former Neveh Dekalim settlement that they did not have time to dispose of.

The smoldering trash sent plumes of black smoke curling into the sky. The cement bridge on a road exclusively built for Jewish settlers lay smashed and broken. Piles of cement rubble bulldozed

by the army lay where settler homes once stood surrounded by well-tended gardens.

Palestinians stood on the flat-topped roofs of nearby homes and watched the Israeli soldiers prepare to leave.

It's not clear what will happen now that the last Israeli tank has rumbled back into Israel.

Palestinians fear internecine violence as rival groups wrestle for status and control in the chaos of Gaza. Israel is wary of Palestinian terrorist groups, which Abbas has refused to disarm, gaining an upper hand on the Palestinian Authority and launching attacks on Israel.

Halutz said he expects the Palestinian Authority to control Gaza in an orderly way and make sure that militant groups do not attack the Jewish state.

"This is their true test. We will not tolerate their ineptitude, turn a blind eye to their failures or ignore acts of terror. They will not be able to shirk their responsibility," he said. ■

'We will not tolerate their ineptitude, turn a blind eye to their failures or ignore acts of terror.'

Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz
Army's chief of staff

Gaza documentary honored

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — A Gaza Strip documentary whose director was killed by Israeli troops won three awards at a pre-Emmy Awards ceremony.

"Death in Gaza," by the late British cameraman James Miller, won awards for outstanding direction, outstanding cinematography and exceptional merit in nonfiction filmmaking at Sunday's television prize ceremony in Los Angeles, which precedes the prime-time Emmy Awards by a week.

Miller was shot dead by Israeli soldiers in the flashpoint Gaza town of Rafah while

filming the last scene of the documentary, in 2003.

Israel declined to press serious charges against the unit involved, citing lack of evidence.

Commenting on the award, the late director's relative Sophy Miller said, "Three Emmys but still no justice. We are all immensely proud of James but will not rest until we get justice. The IDF, Israel's national army, shot and killed James; they failed to investigate his killing properly. They have to be held to account." ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Abdullah to reach out to U.S. Jews

Jordan's King Abdullah II will deliver an address aimed at bringing Muslims and Jews closer together.

The lecture, set for Sept. 21 in Washington, is entitled "Islam and Judaism: Beyond Tolerance" and stems from a summit meeting he hosted this summer of mainstream Muslim leaders who condemned Islamic extremists.

He is also reaching out to Christian groups during his Washington stay.

Canada bans religious law

The leader of a Canadian province pledged to ban all forms of religious arbitration.

Reacting to global protests against the possible implementation of sharia, or Islamic religious law, in Ontario, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced Sunday that Canada's most populous province will ban sharia and all other forms of religious arbitration, including rulings from rabbinical courts and Christian religious tribunals. "There will be no sharia law in Ontario.

There will be no religious arbitration in Ontario. There will be one law for all Ontarians," McGuinty said.

Jewish groups have reacted with surprise and consternation to news that disputants within the Jewish community may no longer voluntarily submit to a *beit din*, or rabbinical court, for binding arbitration in matters involving family law.

Rabbinical courts have been practicing in Ontario for more than a century and were empowered to do so by provincial legislation enacted in 1991.

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas exults over Gaza

The Palestinian Authority president called the Gaza withdrawal his people's biggest reason to celebrate in a century.

"This is a day of happiness and joy that the Palestinian people have not witnessed in a century," Mahmoud Abbas told reporters Monday as Israel completed its Gaza pullout.

Touring evacuated settlements, Abbas warned that if Israel does not also quit the entire West Bank, Palestinians will not consider their demands met.

But he also praised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for engineering the move and voiced hope that it could restart peace talks.

Abbas pledged to restore calm by Jan. 25, when Palestinian parliamentary elections are to be held.

Rocket on Sderot

Palestinian terrorists fired a rocket from the Gaza Strip at a town in southern Israel.

There were no casualties from Monday's launch against Sderot, which came as Israel completed its withdrawal from Gaza.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said Israel would show "zero tolerance" toward such cross-border attacks, but there was no immediate military response to the salvo, which reportedly included a second attempted launch against Kibbutz Yad Mordechai.

Addressing reporters, the commander of the Gaza withdrawal suggested that Israel could respond in kind to such shellings.

"Artillery is certainly part of our defensive kit now," Maj. Gen. Dan Harel said.

Drones to monitor Palestinian terrorism

Israel ordered a fleet of spy drones to help monitor Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

Israel Aircraft Industries said Monday that it had received a \$50 million order for Heron unmanned aerial vehicles.

Security sources said that most of the aircraft would fly over Gaza to make up for intelligence lost on the ground after this week's military pullout.

Israel plans to continue controlling Gaza's airspace and coastal waters.

Foreign experts believe some Israeli drones are capable of firing missiles at ground targets.

WORLD

Protestant-Jewish relations in France improving

A leading French Protestant said relations between his group and French Jews are improving.

Jean-Arnold de Clermont, the president of the Protestant Federation of France, made his comments in an interview this month in *Reform*, his group's magazine.

He announced that a commission of theological research will be founded this month as a collaboration between the Protestant Federation and the *Consistoire*, the umbrella group of religious French Jewish organizations.

The State of Israel is important for Christians as well, he noted, because "we are obviously aware that Christianity is anchored in Judaism."

Dina Azoulay, an official with the French Jewish umbrella group, CRIF, who is responsible for its relations with Protestants, said Clermont's comments are particularly important because he has been a strong supporter of the Palestinians in the past.

A joint Protestant-Jewish trip to Israel is being organized by CRIF for the end of November.

British protesters want to block arms fair

Protesters in Britain vowed to block a controversial London arms fair this week in which Israel will participate.

The biannual Defence Systems and Equipment International, the U.K.'s largest arms event, is due to take place this week in London, with Israel having its own national pavilion at the conference for the first time.

Thousands of activists are expected to protest the event, with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign calling on its supporters to join a rally Tuesday.

Campaigners also are angry that countries with dubious human rights records such as Indonesia and China will be among the exhibitors.

Ukrainians dedicate terror memorial

Ukraine's president joined Jewish leaders and others Sunday for the opening ceremony of a monument dedicated to terror victims.

The Kiev monument — a bronze and concrete heart split in two parts, with the words "You shall not kill" written on the sculpture in different languages — was built on the initiative of a Ukrainian interfaith group and Vadim Rabinovich, a Ukrainian business magnate and Jewish philanthropist who provided funding.

"We should formulate our stand very clearly," President Viktor Yushenko said. "Terrorism is the evil — no matter in what part of the world it shows itself and what nations or countries it does affect."

Belgium gets a female rabbi

Brussels' French-speaking liberal community celebrated the arrival of Belgium's first female rabbi.

On Sunday, Congregation Beth Hillel also inaugurated its new building, the first in the country that is specifically designed to house a non-Orthodox community, while welcoming its recently appointed rabbi, Paris-born Floriane Chinsky.