

## IN THE NEWS

## Israel, Palestinians reach Gaza border deal

Israel and the Palestinian Authority reached an agreement on opening the Gaza Strip border.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was the chief mediator of the deal announced Tuesday, under which the Rafah terminal on the Gaza-Egypt border will open by the end of the month.

Palestinians who use the crossing will be monitored by European Union security experts.

Israeli officials will be allowed to watch the action at the terminal and ask monitors to search potential terrorist infiltrators or arms smugglers.

## Omri Sharon pleads guilty

Ariel Sharon's son pleaded guilty in a Likud Party funding scandal.

Omri Sharon could face imprisonment as part of the plea bargain Tuesday at Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court, accepting reduced felony charges of perjury and fraud in connection with allegedly illicit foreign financing for his father's 1999 run for the Likud leadership.

Attorney General Menachem Mazuz decided against also indicting the prime minister in the case, citing lack of evidence.

## UJC sets new overseas model

The North American Jewish federation system approved a new process for allocating funds overseas.

Meeting Tuesday at the end of the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly in Toronto, UJC's board of trustees unanimously approved a resolution that calls on the system's chief overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, to negotiate their own share of overseas funds.

The format will be effective for a two-year period beginning July 1, 2006.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Facing challenge of Internet age, BBYO seeks a way to reach teens

By CHANAN TIGAY

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — In the television world, network execs drool over the 18- to 34-year-old demographic, since young viewers often help boost advertising revenue.

Young people, and teens in particular, also are seen as an essential target audience for Jewish educators, who view them as the key to another kind of currency: Jewish continuity.

In recent years, however, educators are finding their wares an increasingly tough sell to young Jews.

"Jewish teens have changed," says Matthew Grossman, executive director of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. "We can't expect the same formula to work today that worked 80 years ago. Teens aren't joining groups like they did."

"The reality is that a vast majority of Jewish teens are not connecting Jewishly during the teenage years," he adds. "If you take out the Orthodox community, it's a vast, vast majority."

In this light, BBYO has launched a new initiative aimed at reaching Jewish teens in their own milieu, an online Internet community.

In the old formula — what BBYO's senior manager of marketing and communications, Abby Strunk, calls a membership model — the group would engage Jewish teens who then became BBYO members, signing on to lead local chapters, regions or the international body.

While that model is still in use, today's realities have led BBYO to re-examine the model, making positive Jewish experiences

available to teens whether or not they're affiliated with the group.

BBYO recently launched b-linked, an online community built on the model of social-networking sites like Friendster and Facebook, online communities that connect people through networks of friends for dating or making new acquaintances.

The site, [www.b-linked.org](http://www.b-linked.org), aims to revolutionize the way Jewish teens connect with each other. BBYO leaders hope that 50,000-100,000 Jewish teens will join b-linked over the next four years.

The site was launched in October and made available initially to the BBYO community. It already has more than 2,000 members, and the group is publicizing the initiative more broadly in an effort to attract a wider spectrum of teens.

"Our goal is to get as many Jewish teens onto the site as possible, and then deliver them meaningful Jewish experiences," Grossman says.

Lynn Schusterman, who Grossman says has been instrumental in enabling BBYO to move in this new direction, says she sees b-linked as similar to birthright israel, a program that brings young Jews to Israel for free in hopes that they'll become more involved Jewishly and more involved with Israel.

"We're hoping that if a kid logs on to b-linked, they'll get involved in Jewish camping, Jewish youth groups, Jewish summer programs," says Schusterman, of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

The site has the potential to engage teens who are otherwise unaffiliated and "may be turned off by a synagogue or, potentially, a youth group, or even Jewish camping," she

*Continued on page 2*

FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES

## ■ A venerable Jewish youth group uses the latest technology to reach out to teens

*Continued from page 1*

says. "When they log on to this, it's something that's hip and cool."

While BBYO would love to see these teens join the organization, it's satisfied if they simply find a way to engage positively in Jewish life through the site.

Those who sign up on b-linked can create personal profiles to share with other members; communicate through message boards about music, movies, sports, volunteer work and other favorite subjects; find help with the college-admissions process; shop for apparel and other merchandise; write online journals; and learn about upcoming events ranging from sports contests to community service.

B-linked will offer various sub-communities on a variety of topics. The sub-communities include:

- b-accepted will provide tools to aid in the college-admissions process. Teens who join b-linked will receive a 10 percent discount on a Princeton Review college prep course;
- b-inspired will link teens who are interested in Judaism and spirituality;
- b-everywhere will offer information on travel opportunities;
- b-yisrael will be devoted to information on Israel;
- b-alive will focus on health and wellness.

"The beauty of it is that the kids provide all the content and activity," says Marc Goldberg, senior technical manager of AOL Internet Access, who provided feedback on the site as BBYO developed

it. "The members or non-members that want to sit back and observe can do that, and still be able to take on a sense of ownership as they find the areas that they like to haunt."

Strunk says the significance of b-linked lies not simply in the establishment of a Web site — other Jewish youth groups have Web sites, and some offer opportunities for browsers to chat online — but in "the establishment of a networking community that allows teens to connect with one another."

Rabbi Sid Schwarz, founder and president of the Washington-based Panim: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, calls b-linked "inspired and brilliant."

Panim recently ran its annual Jewish Teen Leadership Summit, which brings together top Jewish teen leaders from the youth movements and beyond.

On the last day of the meeting, participants brainstormed for several hours about programs they'd like to see in the Jewish community. Their initial 25 ideas ultimately were boiled down to two, one of which was called Jew Wire.

"They essentially described BBYO's initiative," Schwarz says.

Schwarz says it's telling that a "cross-section of highly talented Jewish teens" charged with bettering the Jewish community independently arrived at a program nearly identical to the BBYO initiative.

The site also represents a new direc-

tion for BBYO, whose leaders say it's changing course to meet today's challenges head-on. At its height in the late 1960s, BBYO had 45,000 members between its boys group, AZA — a Hebrew acronym for Fraternity, Charity and Benevolence — and its girls group, B'nai B'rith Girls.

Today, BBYO, which has been independent of B'nai B'rith International for three years, has 16,000 members.

"BBYO for 80 years was based upon a membership model; there was only one doorway to get in," Strunk says. B-linked "provides, potentially, hundreds of doorways."

Rob Callender, trends director at the Chicago-based Teenage Research Unlimited, a market research firm focusing on teens, says a site like b-linked could present BBYO with something of a Catch-22.

"Friendster and other social-networking Web sites are extremely popular, and in that vein it couldn't do any harm," he says.

On the other hand, teens today are attracted to diversity, and b-linked "may be perceived as being slightly limited if it only caters to the active Jewish community."

Grossman says that while spirituality is "hot" in the Jewish teen community, "teens don't necessarily equate spirituality" with Jewish practice.

"Our strategy is to play to the things that appeal to Jewish teens the most," he says.

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**Matthew Grossman**  
B'nai B'rith Youth Organization

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## Violinist's son fired for remarks

BERLIN (JTA) — The son of famous Jewish violinist Yehudi Menuhin lost his job in Germany over extremist statements.

The board of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation fired Gerard Menuhin as president after it learned of his anti-Jewish statements in far-right German publications.

In columns and interviews in the National Zeitung newspaper, the Web site of the National Democratic Party of Germany and the monthly magazine Deutsche Stimme, Menuhin, 57, reportedly referred

to "an international lobby of influential people and associations that put Germans under pressure for their own purposes."

He said Germans are under "endless blackmail" because of the Holocaust, and that "a people that allows itself to be intimidated 60 years after the end of the war with the events of that time is not healthy."

The case underscores the tendency in some circles to embrace Jewish representatives as vehicles for anti-Jewish or anti-Israel views.

# U.S. eyes Israel's treatment of liberal Jews

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel's rating improved slightly in this year's U.S. State Department report on religious freedom, but a closer reading suggests the Jewish state should watch the way it treats minorities — and not just Israeli Arabs.

The "Israel and Occupied Territories" chapter in the 2005 International Religious Freedom Report expands its criticisms of Israel's treatment of non-Orthodox Jewish denominations, and places Israel on notice that the United States is monitoring its treatment of other minorities, including "messianic Jews" and faiths practiced by guest workers.

Rabbi David Saperstein, who directs the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Washington, said his group had noted an increased interest in the status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel.

"I'm glad that the report reflects that," he said. "There's no country in the world where discrimination against Reform and Conservative rabbis per se is as blatant as it is in Israel."

As in 2004, the recent report finds "no change" in describing religious freedom inside Israel; it also found "no change" in the parts of the West Bank Israel controls, compared to "deterioration" the previous year. In addition, the report's "holding sentences" — which summarize the essence of the report — reflect a slight overall improvement for Israel.

But the "no change" status does not let Israel off the hook: Similar to reports from previous years, the 2005 analysis says Israel's government "discriminates against non-Jewish citizens and residents, the vast majority of whom are Arab Muslims and Christians, in the areas of employment, education, and housing."

What's new is that the treatment of non-Orthodox Jewish streams received much greater emphasis.

For instance, the second sentence of the 2004 report reads, "There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were problems with regard to equal treatment of religious minorities."

In this year's report, the same sentence

is expanded with a reference to the non-Orthodox streams: "There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems continued to exist stemming from the unequal treatment of religious minorities, and from the State's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status

matters concerning Jews."

Lengthy passages in the report expand on the alleged discrimination, looking at the status of non-Jewish spouses of Jewish immigrants; allegations of discriminatory funding in favor of Orthodox schools; and the state of efforts to legislate civil marriage. Such allegations of discrimination have circulated for years in Israel, but previous reports hardly addressed them.

Saperstein, who said his group has raised these issues in meetings with Bush administration officials, said the expanded interest was in keeping with the administration's recent emphasis on human rights abroad.

"The State Department is trying to lay down more consistent standards in these areas and to hold friends and allies to the same standards as it holds other nations," he said. "It's hopeful that this will make Israel sit up and take notice when it sees the international community so deeply troubled."

Spokesmen for the Israeli Embassy in Washington and for the State Department did not return calls seeking comment, but a briefing on the report suggested that the Bush administration is intensifying its interest in religious freedoms abroad.

"Even some of the most open societies in the world have limited freedom of religion in ways that are difficult to justify," said John Hanford, the official who directed production of this year's report. "It is the purpose of this report to encourage abroad, just as we do here in the United States, a careful and continual examina-

tion by every government and society as to whether each person's right to believe as he or she chooses is fully protected or unnecessarily limited."

There were other examples of heightened interest in how Israel treats its minorities. For the first time, the 2005 report listed complaints by "messianic Jews" — who believe in Jesus but still claim to be Jewish — that their members were denied entry to Israel and that

anti-missionary groups harassed them.

It also listed, for the first time, a breakdown of the religions of legal foreign workers, though it did not allege discrimination. The report broke down how religious councils spend money — the vast majority goes to Jewish councils — also a first in a U.S. report.

There also were the traditional criticisms of how Israel treats its Arab minorities. If anything, these were expanded, with new attention paid to alleged neglect and mistreatment of abandoned mosques.

There also was a lengthy treatment of allegations that the Jewish National Fund discriminates in the distribution of land, a facet of Jewish-Arab relations uncovered in earlier reports. The report did not take a stand on the allegations.

The treatment of Palestinians also received close attention, with special attention to how Israel's West Bank security barrier that has reduced terrorist attacks also has kept Palestinian Muslims and Christians from reaching religious services in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The report also upped its grade for the Palestinian Authority from "deteriorating" last year to "no change" in 2005, largely because of P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas' efforts to prevent anti-Israel incitement. It also said Abbas apparently had ended the extortion of property from Christians by Muslim gangs, though it noted that the authorities had yet to address earlier complaints.

The report also noted complaints by Palestinian Media Watch, an Israeli watchdog group, that Palestinian textbooks continue to delegitimize Israel.



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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Holocaust denier sent to Germany

The United States deported a man to Germany to be imprisoned as a Holocaust denier.

The deportation came Tuesday, after the U.S. Supreme Court last week rejected an appeal by Germar Rudolph, also known as Germar Scheerer, who published a study he said proved the Nazis did not gas Jews at Auschwitz.

He was sentenced in 1995 in Germany to 14 months in prison for Holocaust denial, but fled to the United States before going to jail.

#### Prosecutors say suspect wasn't tortured

Federal prosecutors said an American accused of laundering money to terrorist groups was not tortured by Israeli police.

Muhammed Salah, who has been accused in Chicago of laundering millions of dollars to Hamas, claimed last month he was threatened and abused by police in Israel before confessing in 1993 and serving more than four years in prison on similar charges.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Ferguson said Salah did not show signs of abuse and did not claim he was tortured at the time.

#### Katrina refugees study in Israel

Twenty students whose campuses were shut down by Hurricane Katrina are attending Israeli universities.

The Jewish Agency for Israel said the students, hailing from California, Texas, New York, Illinois, Florida, Wisconsin and Missouri, opened the fall 2006 semester this month at five universities in Israel.

Under the agency's "academic refugee" program, the students can enjoy up to a year of study in Israel free of charge.

### MIDDLE EAST

#### NATO generals in Israel

NATO air force chiefs held a security conference with Israel.

The annual event was held in Tel Aviv this week as part of the organization's Partnership for Peace and Mediterranean Dialogue, and focused on the use of air power in national security.

According to Israeli sources, the NATO officers were especially interested in Israel's advanced command and control systems. Israel has been in talks with NATO about developing closer relations.

#### Ward replaced as Mideast coordinator

The United States announced the appointment of a new Army general to oversee Israeli-Palestinian security coordination.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Tuesday that Lt. Gen. William Ward, appointed in February to help pave the way for Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, would be replaced by Maj. Gen. Keith Dayton.

No immediate date was given for the handover. Dayton previously served as director of the Iraq Survey Group, which searched for alleged weapons of mass-destruction developed by Saddam Hussein.

#### Abbas lashes out

Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel of poor faith in peacemaking.

In a televised speech Tuesday, the Palestinian Authority president said Israel "is still acting on the basis of unilateral solutions, as if it has no Palestinian partner."

He said Israel had no intention of seeking a permanent peace settlement and accused Israel of fomenting civil war in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by insisting that the Palestinian Authority meet its commitments to crack down on terrorists.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, while vowing to keep West Bank settlement blocs, has said he would like to see a Palestinian state living alongside the Jewish state, but not at the price of security.

#### Captain cleared in girl's death

An Israeli army captain was cleared of wrongdoing in the death of a Palestinian girl.

The officer was brought up on charges after his unit shot dead a girl in the Gaza Strip last year, suspecting her of carrying a bomb, and two soldiers reported that the officer "confirmed the kill" by riddling the girl's body with bullets.

A court martial in Tel Aviv acquitted the captain of conduct unbecoming an officer Tuesday, finding that the testimony against him was tainted.

#### Katrina victims to get help

A new initiative aims to help Hurricane Katrina victims cope with post-traumatic stress.

A consortium initiated by the UJA-Federation of New York, the United Jewish Communities and the Israel Trauma Coalition will provide mental-health professionals from New York and Israel to train local professionals who can help children and families, among other programs.

#### Police, Bedouin clash in Negev

At least two people were hurt in a confrontation between Israeli police and Bedouins.

Tuesday's violence erupted when police arrived at El Massas, a Bedouin village in the Negev, to serve eviction notices to residents of illegally built homes.

Some locals threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the police, who reportedly responded with gunfire. Israel's Bedouin complain of neglect by the state, saying it does not do enough to recognize their encampments and communities.

### WORLD

#### UNESCO marks Rabin death

UNESCO marked the 10th anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin's death.

The U.N. education, science and culture organization commemorated the late Israeli prime minister in Paris as representatives of Arab nations looked on, the Jerusalem Post reported.

"The words Yitzhak Rabin said here at UNESCO are still in our memories," said the group's director general, Kohichiro Matsuura. "Peace will settle in slowly, in everyday life, in small gestures, in trivial details. It will be built step by step through the actions of men and women."

#### Vatican document anniversary marked

Irish Jews and Catholics celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Vatican document that rejected collective Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death.

Monday night's meeting marked "a revolution unparalleled in human history" marking an "amazing transformation" of Catholic attitudes toward Jews over the past 40 years, said Rabbi David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's international director of interreligious affairs.

Rosen, a former chief rabbi of Ireland, spoke at a commemoration of the anniversary at Dublin's main synagogue.

Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and Dermot Lane, president of the Mater Dei Institute, an Irish seminary and theological college, also spoke at the event. Lane urged his fellow Christians to "remember that our birth certificate carries a Jewish address."