

## IN THE NEWS

## Israel to hold early elections

Ariel Sharon and Israel's new Labor Party chief agreed to hold early elections.

In a brief meeting Thursday, the Israeli prime minister and Amir Peretz decided to bring forward elections, currently scheduled for November 2006, to February or March.

The date is expected to be set Monday.

## Israel kills two terrorists

Israeli troops killed two Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank.

The two Al-Aksa Brigades members, both on Israel's wanted list, were shot dead Thursday as they tried to circumvent an army checkpoint near Jenin.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, troops arrested five Hamas terrorists.

## Darfur, Katrina focus for Reform Jews

The Sudan refugee crisis, hunger and hurricane relief were focal points of the opening session of the Union for Reform Judaism's biennial in Houston.

As several dozen members of Gulf Coast Reform congregations displaced by Hurricane Katrina marched in Wednesday night carrying Torahs rescued from the floods, Rabbi Robert Loewy of Gates of Prayer in Metairie, La., thanked the URJ for its new fundraising campaign to support the four New Orleans-area Reform congregations.

The 4,200 convention delegates were handed pledge cards to donate to the fund.

Delegates passed a resolution honoring the 20th anniversary of Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger.

The URJ honored the president of the American Jewish World Service, Ruth Messinger, who spoke about her recent work aiding refugees in Darfur and urged delegates to support the bipartisan Darfur Peace and Accountability Act.

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# WORLD REPORT

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## What can link non-religious Jews? Guilt & Pleasure offers an answer

By CHANAN TIGAY

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — Mireille Silcoff already had been hired to edit the new Jewish magazine; now she just needed to give it a name.

"At one point I just started asking people, 'What are the first things you think of when you think about your Jewishness?'" Silcoff recalled. "You can't imagine how many times 'guilt' came up — and 'pleasure' came up enough to be interesting."

Guilt & Pleasure — "A magazine for Jews and the people who love them" — hits newsstands across North America this week, offering readers content ranging from long-form essays and memoirs to fiction, comics, photography and archival material.

The quarterly journal was created by Reboot, a three-year-old nonprofit network of young Jews that promotes projects exploring issues of identity and community. The magazine aims not only to inform and entertain, its creators say, but to get Jews talking about issues they think ought to be more fully explored.

"The magazine is a means to an end," said Roger Bennett, its publisher along with Reboot, and vice president at the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies in New York. "All of it is meant to be raw material that anyone, anywhere can use — invite 20 of their friends round to their home to start to have an argument."

Observers of American Jewish culture say the magazine debuts during an unusual burst of cultural creativity among young North American Jews, and reflects these innovators' drive to assert themselves as distinctively, if not religiously, Jewish.



Guilt & Pleasure

The debut edition of Guilt & Pleasure magazine.

"It's very much a sense of recovering peoplehood and culture as distinctive elements in the lives of young Jews, even young Jews who seem turned off by what they find in synagogues," said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of Jewish history at Brandeis University.

"I think that Guilt & Pleasure in some ways is also part of that: You don't want to go to synagogue? Familiarize yourself with American Jewish literature, which will give you a feeling for Jewish culture," he said.

Each issue will revolve around a theme.

*Continued on page 2*

ARTS  
&  
CULTURE

■ *A Jewish magazine that's meant to be 'the best discussion you've had at the dinner table'*

*Continued from page 1*

The first, called Home & Away, will examine issues of "place and identity and the nexus between them," Bennett said, and includes original contributions from novelists Gary Shteyngart, Lara Vapnyar and Etgar Keret as well as graphic artist Ben Katchor.

The second will look at fights and battles; the third is about magic.

The idea that spawned the magazine was a series of highly popular salons that Silcoff — G&P's editor in chief — ran out of her Toronto living room beginning three years ago. Soon hundreds of people were clamoring to get in on the discussions, and similar salons are regularly held these days in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Montreal.

Guilt and Pleasure's editorial and production team hopes the new journal will generate similar talking parties across the continent — and thinks the interplay of the magazine's pieces will itself function as a kind of debate.

"It's meant to be the best discussion you've ever had at the dinner table, in a magazine," Silcoff said.

As the magazine's Web site, [www.guiltandpleasure.com](http://www.guiltandpleasure.com), puts it, "It would be a sin for an individual to quietly read a magazine that covers the theme of community alone."

In this vein, each edition will be connected to interactive Web-based discussion guides.

The editorial board boasts a series of well-respected names coming out of a

series of disparate fields. They include Shteyngart, Vapnyar and novelist Jonathan Safran Foer; magazine writers Susan Dominus and A.J. Jacobs; and photographers/graphic artists Gillian Laub and Seymour Chwast.

In what may be an unintentional nod to two icons of Jewish literature — Kugelmass, of Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode" and Alexander Portnoy of Philip Roth's "Portnoy's Complaint" — the magazine's editorial board includes scholars Jack Kugelmass of Arizona State University and Eddie Portnoy of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Shteyngart's contribution to the inaugural issue is a short play, a fictional account of an interview between Mikvah Tannenblatt, senior correspondent for K kosher Homes & Gardens, and one "Jerry Shteynfarb," novelist.

It opens with the following exchange:  
Mikvah Tannenblatt: Where's your mezuzah?

Jerry Shteynfarb: My what?  
M.T.: Every other apartment on your floor has a mezuzah. Where's yours?

J.S.: Oh, the door thing. Well, it doesn't really fit in with my aesthetic, which is more, you know, secular. Besides, everyone else on this floor is Orthodox. Except for the nice Chinese lady down the hall.

As a "strong proponent" of secular Jewish culture, Shteyngart — who wrote the best-selling "The Russian Debutante's Handbook" and the forthcoming "Absurdistan" — says typical Jewish newspapers, emanating from a "very organized community basis," don't speak to him.

Guilt & Pleasure, which he called a Jewish Paris Review, does.

"For as long as there have been Jews in America, there have been Jewish secular cultural enterprises," he said. Still, he sometimes wonders what, if anything, binds non-religious Jews.

"What among secular Jews makes us a community? Are we a community? I don't have an answer for that," he said. But he's hoping Guilt & Pleasure will spur some discussion on the topic.

Sarna said young Jews are fueling a level of creativity and vibrance not seen in North American Jewry since the heyday of the chavurah movement three decades ago. Much of this activity, he

said, is an effort to forge community by young Jews who want to differentiate themselves from other whites in North America.

The new journal is not the first such effort. In fact, Sarna said, the emergence of this broader creative energy is a "replay of a moment I've seen four or five times in my life — and all of them

have had positive results." He cites several examples of related moments:

In the early 20th century, there was Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan's synagogue-center model, sometimes called the "shul with a pool," which aimed to draw Jews into synagogues by offering gymnasiums, social halls and schools in addition to sanctuaries and prayer services.

More recently came Heeb, an irreverent magazine targeting young, Jewish hipsters which also has defined itself as a cultural movement, offering parties and literary events in addition to the publication.

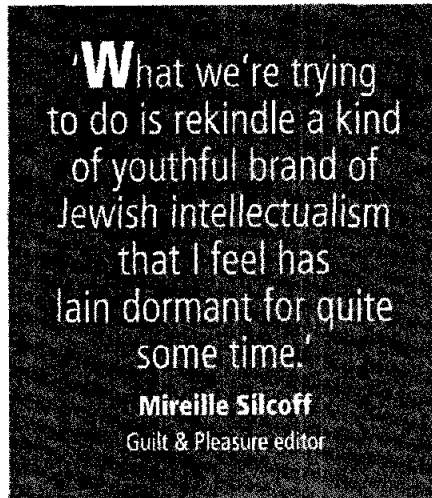
Then there are entertainers like Sarah Silverman, a comedian known for pointed, no-holds barred riffs on ethnicity — often her own.

She is "somebody who seems to have a quite deep feeling of what it is to be Jewish — you'd have to have that kind of feeling in order to mock the tradition the way she does," Sarna said.

Silcoff said Guilt & Pleasure hearkens back to a Jewish tradition that has less to do with religion so much as wrestling with Jewishness.

"My mission is not continuity," she said. "It's not a magazine about keeping people Jews or getting people to marry Jewish people and have Jewish babies."

"What we're trying to do is rekindle a kind of youthful brand of Jewish intellectualism that I feel has lain dormant for quite some time." ■



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# Program designed for Orthodox students

By SUE FISHKOFF

BROOKLYN (JTA) — One afternoon in September, Nalini Ibragimov is teaching Torah to nine young women at Brooklyn College. It's the students' two-hour free period, which the college gives twice a week to encourage clubs and sports.

Instead of eating a longer lunch or going swimming, these nine modestly dressed young women are discussing with Ibragimov, their rebbetzin on campus, the finer points of the 39 malachot, or acts of labor forbidden on Shabbat.

Nalini Ibragimov, 28, and her husband, 30-year-old Rabbi Reuven Ibragimov, were sent to Brooklyn College three years ago through the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus, a program sponsored by the Orthodox Union, Hillel and the Torah Mitzion organization to serve the needs of Orthodox students.

Since the program began five years ago, there are JLIC couples on 12 U.S. campuses — three of them newly placed this September — as well as at Oxford University in

England. Each couple is a young rabbi and his wife, charged with teaching classes, running Shabbat programs, ensuring that religious services and kosher food are available and providing a frum-friendly atmosphere for students coming out of the Orthodox day-school world.

The JLIC's national director, Rabbi Ilan Haber, who works out of Hillel headquarters in Washington, says the program works in conjunction with Hillel at each campus, and only sends married couples.

"We feel there's a need for both male and female role models for the students," he explains.

Four of the nine women in Nalini Ibragimov's class spent last year studying in Jerusalem at all-girls seminaries. All say they're thrilled to have the Ibragimovs on campus.

Meira Sanders, 19, says she likes "just having a rabbi you can ask questions."

Sarah Roller, 18, says "it's really important to have an Orthodox woman to look up to."

Several of the young women say the JLIC presence eases their transition from high school, where at least half their classes were on religious subjects. One-third of Brooklyn College's 10,000 students are Jewish, but this is the first experience

in a primarily secular world for these nine students, and they're anxious for regular doses of Yiddishkeit.

"If there weren't religious studies here, I don't think I would have come," Roller says.

Haber says that as more and more modern Orthodox young people began attending universities other than Yeshiva University and its affiliate for women, Stern College, the traditional choices for this community, Orthodox leaders and parents saw the need to provide ongoing religious counseling and services to them during their campus years.

In many ways, JLIC is similar to Chabad's on-campus program: Both send a young rabbi and wife, who open their homes to students as well as providing a wide range of Torah classes, rabbinic services and personal outreach.

A major difference, however, is that the JLIC couples are sent to serve students who already are Orthodox, whereas Chabad couples actively reach out to the entire Jewish spectrum.

Though JLIC couples welcome every Jew to their programs — and would be happy to shepherd non-observant young people down the frum path — that's not their mandate.

"The primary purpose is to serve the needs of the Orthodox population," Haber confirms. "It's not an outreach program, it's an inreach to Orthodox students."

Also unlike the Chabad campus couples, who rarely have gone to college, the JLIC couples are university graduates.

Reuven Ibragimov graduated from Brooklyn College seven years ago, and Nalini went to Barnard. Reuven says that when he was a student there was no Hillel rabbi on campus, and no way to find out what services or Torah classes were available for Orthodox students.

Moreover, he says, "I never saw my rabbi interact with their wives."

At Brooklyn College, he and Nalini take their children with them to most events, and students clamor to hold 2-year-old Meira in their arms.

Rabbi Aryeh and Sharona Kaplan, both 26, arrived in September 2004 as JLIC reps

at UCLA. Over the past year they have instituted weekly Shabbat lunches and holiday meals at Hillel, and invite students to their home for Shabbat meals when the university is closed.

They also strengthened the daily minyans, Sharona Kaplan says, noting that her husband "wakes the boys up and drives around picking them up" to make sure they get to shacharit services on time.

Like other JLIC couples, the Kaplans work closely with Hillel. At the Enormous Activities Fair during UCLA's wel-

come week in September, Sharona Kaplan stepped away from her own brochure-laden table to help out at the busier Hillel table.

A first-year student perusing Hillel's sign-up sheet seemed stuck on one question.

"So what kind of services are you looking for? Liberal, Conservative, Orthodox?" Kaplan asked her.

"The least religious," the girl said, and Kaplan helped her mark the box for "Reform."

That doesn't bother Kaplan at all — each student should find what's appropriate for his or herself, she believes.

Some Reform and Conservative students look at the JLIC program and wish their movements would fund professionals on campus too. Both the Reform and Conservative movements depend on student volunteers to do campus outreach.

Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller, UCLA's long-time Hillel director, thinks it's a shame.

"Between JLI, Chabad and JAM," a Southern-California based Orthodox outreach program, "the Orthodox are investing hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the Reform and Conservative are giving zero," he charges.

"If a kid wants to study Talmud, he can learn with Aryeh" Kaplan, Seidler-Feller says. "But what if he wants to study *Buber*?" There's no liberal rabbi to guide him, Seidler-Feller points out.

That doesn't seem likely to change, at least not soon.

Rabbi Daniel Frelander, vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism, notes that there are Reform students on "several hundred campuses" and says it would be "a fantasy" to think of hiring professionals to serve all of them.

**'It's not an outreach program, it's an inreach to Orthodox students.'**

**Rabbi Ilan Haber**  
JLIC National Director

**WHAT DO STUDENTS WANT?**

# Elderly poor in ex-Soviet lands fear winter

By MICHAEL J. JORDAN

**TBILISI, Georgia (JTA)** — In one of the most affluent pockets of a Soviet Union that vowed to eradicate class differences, Maia Bartkulashvili and Lev Mikhailovich Neiman once enjoyed very different standards of living in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

Take the size of their apartments, where they continue to live today.

Bartkulashvili, 79, a retired Russian-language teacher, lives in the same spartan, one-room apartment she was raised in. Unmarried, she shared the place with her older brother, David, until his death five months ago.

Neiman, on the other hand, lived a life of relative privilege: He was the lead violin soloist in the Tbilisi Opera House for a half-century, while his wife was a ballerina there for 25 years. The opera gave the couple an elegant, three-room apartment.

Despite past differences, however, these two Jews today share a similar plight: They're among the legions of elderly throughout the ex-Soviet world who have lost out in the 15-year transition from Communist dictatorship to "Wild East" capitalism.

They struggle to survive on meager pensions that even the Georgian government concedes place them well below the national poverty line.

As a result, Bartkulashvili and Neiman fear another bitter winter, which makes it a daily challenge just to stay warm and healthy.

To save money on heating, both say they'll be reduced to shuffling around cold apartments bundled in layers of clothes, wearing hats and draped in blankets.

Bartkulashvili, points to a small space-heater stashed in a corner.

"I don't keep it on all day because it's very expensive," she says. "So the room stays cold. Of course I get sick quite often. My feet get cold; I can hardly walk."

Neiman's large apartment is now a curse: It's too expensive to heat all of it.

"The winter frightens me," says the spry 88-year-old. "It's a very hard time for me. Hot weather is better for my health."

Bartkulashvili and Neiman have something else in common: They're two of the 107,000 elderly Jews in the former Soviet

Union who have fallen between the cracks when it comes to Jewish welfare.

While tens of millions of Soviet citizens perished in World War II, the German army never made it south of Stalingrad, which spared Jews in Georgia and elsewhere in the Caucasus.

However, only Jews who suffered directly under the Nazis are eligible for reparations money. That means that tens of thousands of elderly Jews are ineligible for the bulk of the funding allocated to the American Jewish Joint Dis-

tribution Committee, the leading Jewish humanitarian agency serving elderly Jews in 15 former Soviet republics.

JDC officials say the organization's hands are tied. The JDC has two main avenues of funding. One is comprised of individual donations, private foundations and the North American Jewish federation system; the other is money recovered as compensation for stolen or lost Holocaust-related assets via the Claims Conference, the Swiss banks settlement and the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

The JDC has experienced shortfalls in the first funding category, for reasons ranging from U.S. inflation and varying foreign-exchange rates to growing numbers of recipients with a longer life expectancy.

Meanwhile, the latter funds are strictly earmarked for Nazi victims, who make up 125,000 of the JDC's 232,000 clients in the region.

For every dollar spent on Nazi victims in the region, the JDC says it has only 51 cents for those classified as "non-Nazi victims."

That predicament has forced the JDC to impose tighter eligibility requirements and slash services to those eligible for aid. According to the JDC, non-Nazi victims in Ukraine, for example, have experienced a 14 percent drop in food programs, while their counterparts in Russia have seen home-care services plummet by 19 percent in recent years.

To make up the difference and offer the same services to all elderly in the region, the JDC is seeking \$30 million in additional funds over the next three years

from North American donors. The United Jewish Communities — the umbrella group for the North American Jewish federation system — has launched a special campaign, "Operation Promise" for overseas needs. Of the \$160 million the campaign hopes to raise, \$30 million will go to the needs of

the elderly in the region.

Meanwhile, the JDC has taken the unprecedented step of borrowing \$5 million to make up the difference, restoring services in line with what victims of the Nazis receive and providing assistance to newly eligible but indigent elderly.

"For more than 2,000 years, Jews in the Diaspora have always said that one Jew is responsible for another," says Steven Schwager, the JDC's executive vice president. "The fact is that these Jews are some of the poorest Jews on Earth, and we as Americans have a responsibility to care for them."

Through its vast network of Hased organizations, the JDC is a lifeline to Jews in more than 3,000 locations across the former Soviet Union. Hased offers a range of services including hot meals, meals-on-wheels, monthly food packages, medicine, home-nursing care and health check-ups, home repairs, haircuts, eyeglasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs and "winter relief" such as blankets, wood, heating oil and extra cash for bills.

The JDC is trying to publicize the needs to its donors, especially federations that have greater autonomy to earmark their funds.

"We have gotten targeted support from a number of federations and foundations for FSU welfare, but the targeted support hasn't been enough to allow us to keep pace with escalating costs and increased need," JDC spokesman Joshua Berkman says. "As it stands right now, we simply can't offer non-Nazi victims levels of services that are even close to what

The winter frightens me. It's a very hard time for me.

Lev Mikhailovich Neiman

Elderly resident of Tbilisi, Georgia

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

we can provide for those classified as victims.”

Those who approach JDC for help in the former Soviet Union must fill out a questionnaire spelling out where they were during the war and what they were doing. A locally appointed committee then determines the application's validity.

Then the unseemly question is posed: Did this person suffer enough to qualify?

“It's a terrible situation — to have to decide who shall live, who shall die,” Schwager says.

The breakdown of JDC clients in the former Soviet Union between Nazi victims and non-Nazi victims is roughly even. In Georgia, however, just 110 of nearly 2,500 Hesed clients are Nazi victims.

Meanwhile, Georgia's economic situation is among the worst in the former Soviet Union.

Since the USSR disintegrated, Georgia has endured civil war, economic crisis and two separatist movements that killed at least 10,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands of the country's 5.6 million people.

Once one of the more prosperous Soviet republics, Georgia now ranks among the poorest — and no one suffers more than the elderly.

The average monthly pension is 28 lari, or roughly \$15. To appreciate how little that is, a loaf of bread in Tbilisi costs about 25 cents: at a loaf every two days, a single pensioner may pay up to \$4 a month — or one-quarter of his pension — just for bread.

Then there are the other staples like butter, flour, oil, salt, milk, sugar, tea, soap, toothpaste and toilet paper. There are utilities to pay — water, electricity, gas and heat — that are growing more expensive as the government pushes state-subsidized utility companies to stand on their own.

In many cases, the elderly also need medication — not to mention modest luxuries like new clothes or the occasional trip to the beauty salon.

How to afford it all? The answer is that most can't, so relief workers say they're forced into difficult decisions: Heat or medicine?

Bartkulashvili, the retired teacher now

with a \$15 a month pension, didn't always depend on others for survival.

Like most other elderly in the former Soviet Union, she's quick to recall the relative bounty of yesteryear — though she neglects to mention the dictatorship and lack of individual freedom.

She taught at a public school for 48 years.

“I had a career, I had a salary, I had money,” she says. “There were times when 25 people were gathered around the table.”

She lives in a communal flat, with a shared toilet and kitchen. The main room is dimly lit, dominated by a small dining-room table. Hanging from the high ceiling is a fixture with three of five bulbs burnt out.

A few photos and watercolors adorn the walls, but there's surprisingly little decor, considering how long Bartkulashvili has lived here. As the eyes adjust, one notices cracks snaking up the walls and across the ceiling from the 2002 earthquake.

The only whiff of elegance is the ornate plaster relief work along two edges of the ceiling — a clue that this room was the corner of a once-grand private mansion the Soviets seized, subdivided and parceled out many decades ago.

Bartkulashvili says she budgets carefully, spends frugally and still manages to sock some away.

“When I get my pension, I calculate how to use it, then I take a little bit and put it toward the

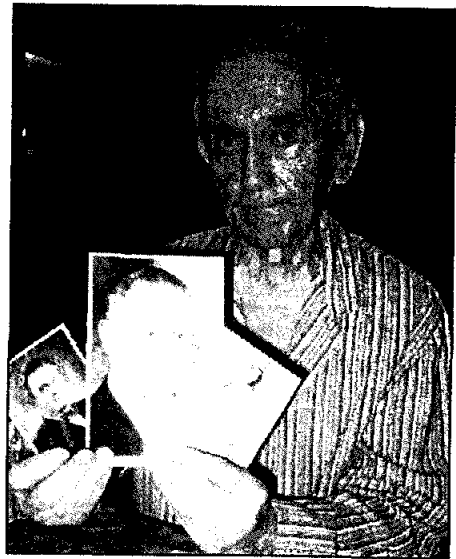
next month,” she says. “Then I save a little more from the second month, and put it toward the third. By the fourth or fifth month, I buy something delicious — sweets, like chocolates with nuts, or maybe fresh fish to cook.”

Hesed provides half her meals, plus a monthly food package.

“To jump from the way my life was to the situation today, it's very difficult,” she says. “Even to think about it, it's difficult.”

Lev Neiman, too, is nostalgic for the past — and with good reason.

He notes that together with his parents and two older brothers, his family has devoted more than 300 years of service to the Opera House. By 13 he was a member of the orchestra; he retired in 1990 at age 73.



Michael J. Jordan

Lev Mikhailovich Neiman, an elderly Jew in the Former Soviet Union, looks at photos of himself and relatives.

“It's quite rare to find a family that was honored to have such high-level musicians,” he says with pride.

Neiman and his wife, Maria Sergeevna, were dedicated to the opera and to the Soviet good life: restaurants and cafes, holidays and travels. They would drive their car to the Black Sea, to the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea's northern coast or into Georgia's spectacular south Caucasus mountain range.

“During Communist times I was filled up to here with everything I wanted,” he says, drawing a line across his chin. “I had a good salary and even had extra money.”

The couple had no children. His wife later became a ballet teacher, he says, pulling out a newspaper photo of three young ballerinas thanking their teacher for her years of service.

She died in 1992, after 44 years of marriage.

Now, after six decades' worth of contributions to Soviet high culture, Neiman receives the same \$15 monthly pension as most of his contemporaries.

He also receives compensation for his World War II military service — another \$21 a month. Still, Neiman receives a monthly Hesed food package that includes sugar, butter and cooking oil.

Neiman is left with two great fears. First is winter. “I spend all day in the kitchen, because the gas in the stove is cheap. I stay warm there.”

The second is loneliness. “I have a book of telephone numbers,” he says, “and when I open it, I remember that almost none of my friends are with me anymore.”

**T**o jump from the way my life was to the situation today, it's very difficult.

**Maia Bartkulashvili**

Elderly resident of  
Tbilisi, Georgia

# After exclusion, Magen David Adom expects change

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Riding the coattails of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Magen David Adom appears to be on the verge of securing full-member status in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies after close to 60 years of exclusion.

On a recent visit to Israel, Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey announced that she would shortly convene a conference at which signatories to the Geneva Conventions would consider an amendment calling for a neutral emblem. That would smooth the way for Israel to shed its observer status in favor of full partnership in the international association.

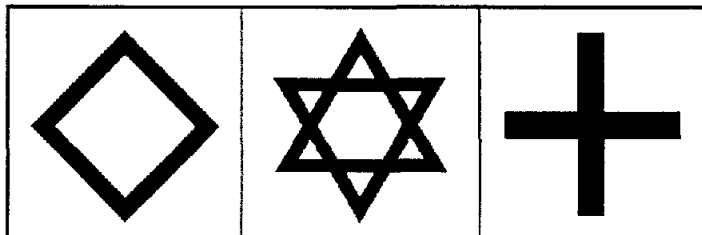
"It's been long overdue," said Arye Mekeel, Israel's consul general in New York. "It's the new and improved atmosphere" following the Gaza withdrawal.

Arab opposition has shut Israel out of the organization for years. The fledgling Jewish state's candidacy was rejected during the Geneva Conventions in 1949, which insisted that new aid groups adopt the Red Cross emblem.

Among the major stumbling blocks has been Arab and Muslim states' refusal to accept the Magen David, or Star of David, as an official symbol, despite the inclusion of the Islamic Red Crescent.

The changes to be discussed early next month in Geneva include creation of a new, neutral emblem to be used by member states that do not wish to use the cross or crescent. The new symbol would be a red crystal, a square resting on one of its corners.

The MDA — for whom full membership could mean increased funding in addition to resolution of its diplomatic isolation — will be free to display the Magen David either inside or next to the red crystal when its members work abroad.



A new Red Crystal symbol would help Magen David Adom become a full member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Above are a possible version of the Red Crystal, and the symbols of MDA and the Red Cross.

The MDA has come close to securing membership in the International Red Cross before. Following several decades at arms length, the group inched closer to the international organization in the late 1990s.

The rapprochement has gained steam with staunch support for MDA from the American Red Cross — which since 2000 has withheld dues to the international body to protest Israel's exclusion — and from the U.S. Congress, which has passed a series of measures demanding that MDA be granted full membership.

The upcoming conference is "a positive step toward reaching universality for the Red Cross movement," Marty Evans, president and CEO of the American Red Cross, said in a statement. "We are hopeful that a diplomatic conference will adopt" the amendment, "thereby paving the way for MDA to become a full voting member of the movement."

While Israel's recent image boost probably helped MDA's cause, the agency's status has been improving for several years, said Yonatan Yagodovsky, director of the International Department of MDA in Israel. He cited several other countries as having been particularly active on Israel's behalf, including the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, Jordan, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Turkey and Bulgaria.

"The wedding invitations were sent, and I hope that there will be a positive resolution in about two weeks in Geneva," Yagodovsky said.

A working committee was created in 1999 to look into clearing the impasse. An amendment to the "third protocol" that would have allowed Israel to fully join the group's ranks was written, and observers expected it be adopted in October 2000.

When the Palestinian intifada broke out in September 2000, however, the political situation it created once again stymied MDA's efforts.

The recent Is-

raeli withdrawal from Gaza has met with widespread support around the world, and Israel, Jewish leaders, and some European Union and other nations see the current moment as ripe for a deal.

This is "a politically propitious time for Switzerland to convene a diplomatic conference and put forward the third protocol," said Andrew Srulevitch, director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Or-

ganizations' department of international affairs. "On its face, there's no legitimate reason for the MDA to be excluded in principle. It has to be done in a way that is politically feasible."

Since the Gaza pullout, some Muslim countries that previously opposed recognizing the Star of David have signaled a willingness to revisit the issue.

Sources say that Pakistan, which had been a leader in opposing MDA's inclusion but recently has taken several steps toward Israel and the American Jewish community, now is more likely to support the move. Jewish leaders and American officials have raised the issue with Pakistan over the last few months.

Most recently, four U.S. senators — Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Elizabeth Dole (R-N.C.), Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) — sent a letter to Calmy-Rey in support of her decision to convene the December conference.

Passage of the new measure will affect not only Israel; Kazakhstan and Eritrea both have significant Muslim and Christian populations and have been reluctant to take on either the red cross or the red crescent symbol.

Observers note that there's no guarantee MDA will be accepted. The move still must be passed by Geneva Conventions signatory nations that include Iran, whose president recently called for Israel to be destroyed.

But the observers note that Switzerland — the depository state of the Geneva Conventions — has been consulting with many of these nations over the last few months, and say it's unlikely the Swiss would call the summit if they weren't convinced the measure would pass.

"We are pretty much at the entrance to the new era," Yagodovsky said.

**'We are pretty much at the entrance to the new era.'**

**Yonatan Yagodovsky**  
International Department of MDA

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Volunteers who fought for Israel to be honored

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — A museum honoring American and Canadian volunteers who fought for Israel's independence will open at the University of Florida.

The central exhibit of the Aliyah Bet and Machal Museum, to be dedicated Sunday, commemorates the deeds of two groups of volunteers.

Some 240 North Americans manned rickety ships to run the British blockade to bring Holocaust survivors and refugees to Palestine between 1946 and 1948 in the clandestine operation named Aliyah Bet. Among the 12 ships was the famed Exodus 1947.

Another 1,000 American and Canadian men and women made their way to the nascent Jewish state to serve in the air force, navy and army in Israel's War of Independence.

Most of the volunteers were World War II veterans. The combat-seasoned fighter pilots, in particular, formed the backbone of the fledgling Israeli air force.

In addition to the North Americans, some 2,500 volunteers from 40 countries served in Machal.

Early next year, a West Coast replica of the Florida exhibit will be installed at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

The central display in the new Hillel building of the University of Florida consists of cabinets framing seven large and seven small panels. In documents, graphics and text, the exhibit documents the history of Zionism and American support, arms acquisitions and recruitment of volunteers, Aliyah Bet and navy service, and Machal volunteers in the Israel Defense Forces.

The final panel commemorates 40 North Americans killed in action for Israel, among them Col. David "Mickey" Marcus and seven Christian volunteers.

The Los Angeles exhibit, organized by Dr. Jason Fenton, will add an eighth panel on the contributions of some 400-500 volunteers from the West Coast, and those who illegally provided Israel with desperately needed arms and aircraft. ■

## Mideast ties in C. America shift

By BRIAN HARRIS

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (JTA) — Following the death of its longtime "ambassador" to Nicaragua, Palestinian diplomacy in Central America faces a murky future.

George Salameh, who had been the fully-accredited ambassador for the "State of Palestine" to Nicaragua and the Palestinian Authority's highest envoy in the region, died Aug. 11 in Cuba from complications following surgery. He was 58.

The Palestinian Authority named Wali Mukac its new envoy to the region, but thus far Nicaragua has not yet given his posting its approval.

By the time of his death, Salameh had become the dean of the diplomatic corps stationed in Nicaragua, with over a dozen years as ambassador and a longer tenure in the region. However, with Nicaragua warming diplomatically to Israel, it is unclear if another Palestinian ambassador will be welcome.

Nicaragua is one of several Central American nations to reassess its ties to the Palestinians and Israel, with Israel making inroads in some countries while fearing setbacks in others. ■

While no one in Nicaragua will openly predict that the country will reverse its full recognition of the "State of Palestine," an inheritance from its revolutionary Sandinista regime of the 1980s, Nicaraguan officials and diplomats stationed here say they do not know if Mukac's credentials will be accepted.

"I do not see why they would not accept his credentials," Issa Salameh, son of the deceased ambassador and interim head of the embassy, said of Mukac. Salameh added that Mukac would not arrive in the country until the end of the year, at the earliest.

"It is a different time, a different situation," Israel's Costa-Rican based ambassador to Nicaragua, Alexander Ben-Zvi, said, adding that for Nicaragua it would be "difficult to go back" suddenly on recognition of Palestine.

The issue is less one of international diplomacy than it is a reflection of the country's divisive internal political situation. The Palestinian Embassy is a legacy of the 1980s, when the Sandinista Revolution

brought to power a leftist regime friendly to radical bands worldwide. Since the Sandinistas were ousted in the 1990 elections, they have remained an influential opposition force, allowing both Palestine and Libya to keep their embassies here open. ■

But presidents since 1990 have changed the tone of the country. In addition to moving closer to the United States and opening relations with Israel, Nicaragua has succumbed to the lure of Taiwan's "dollar diplomacy" policy of providing aid to pet political projects in exchange for diplomatic recognition.

Nicaraguan President Enrique Bolanos had been scheduled to visit Israel last year, but domestic political instability indefinitely postponed the trip.

Meanwhile, El Salvador, along with Costa Rica one of just two countries with an embassy in Jerusalem, may be warming to the Palestinians. The younger Salameh hinted at Palestinian interest in opening an

office in the country.

El Salvadoran President Antonio Saca, of the right-wing ARENA Party, and leftist opposition FMLN leader Shafik Handal are both of Palestinian descent and both helped pay for the Palestine Plaza that opened last year in the capital, San Salvador. Earlier this year, the FMLN-controlled municipality built a Yasser Arafat Plaza on San Salvador's Jerusalem Avenue.

Israel is also facing uncertainty in its diplomacy in the region. While it recently reopened its embassy in Panama, the future of the embassies in Jerusalem remains uncertain.

Former President and 1987 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias is the clear favorite to win February's presidential vote in Costa Rica, and he has already stated that he would pull his country's embassy out of Jerusalem.

If that happens, local Jewish leaders and Israeli diplomats fear it would provide Saca with an excuse to relocate El Salvador's embassy, too, and with the United States continuing to drag its feet on moving its embassy to Jerusalem, Israel's call for recognition of Jerusalem's status as its capital might suffer an international setback. ■

'It is a different time, a different situation.'

Alexander Ben-Zvi  
Israel's Costa-Rican based  
ambassador to Nicaragua

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## WORLD

### Benedict hopes to visit Israel

Pope Benedict said he would like to take up an invitation to visit Israel.

Israeli President Moshe Katsav, who held a 30-minute talk with the pontiff Thursday, said Benedict "responded positively" to his call to visit the Holy Land.

According to Katsav, the visit could take place next year.

The talks at the Vatican capped efforts by Israel and the Catholic Church to patch up ties after the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem voiced anger in July at an anti-terrorism speech by Benedict that neglected to mention attacks on Israel.

Benedict's predecessor, the late Pope John Paul II, visited Israel in 2000.

### Livingstone talks to Jewish magazine

London's mayor, an outspoken critic of Israel, defended himself against charges of anti-Semitism.

In an interview published Thursday with the online magazine *SomethingJewish*, Ken Livingstone attacked his opponents on the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

"The Board of Deputies — and the Jewish Chronicle is their mouthpiece — have this idea that anyone who's critical of Israel gets denounced as being anti-Semitic, so as a result the average spineless politician never says anything about the Middle East again. I just think this is an insult to everyone's intelligence," he said. "So yes, while there are a lot of people who hate my guts because of the position I take on the Middle East, equally there's a huge body of Jewish Londoners who have watched me for 25 years and they know it's crap to denounce me as anti-Semitic."

Livingstone, who has called Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a war criminal and courted an Egyptian cleric who is openly anti-Zionist, hinted that he might have Jewish ancestry.

### Ukrainian's trip to Israel delayed

Ukraine's president canceled his first official visit to Israel due to a "tight schedule." Victor Yushchenko "has a very tight schedule, and the schedule of his foreign visits abroad has been changed," Irina Geraschenko, the president's press secretary, told JTA.

Another reason is that Ukraine just appointed a new ambassador to Israel this month, "and we need more time to arrange the visit," Geraschenko said.

Some observers in the Jewish community said the cancellation could have stemmed from different reasons: Kiev's desire not to irritate Iran, with whom Ukraine is seeking closer economic cooperation.

The allegations have been denied by Yushchenko's staff.

### Europeans release funds for Palestinians

A European official promised to release funds for the Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip.

European Commission official Benita Ferrero-Waldner promised to unblock \$29.2 million, which she earmarked for a new cargo terminal at Gaza Airport.

In announcing the deal, she expressed enthusiasm for positive developments on the Israeli-Palestinian front, including Monday's deal on surveillance at the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

### Russian city to compensate for cemetery vandalism

St. Petersburg, Russia agreed to compensate the Jewish community for vandalism of dozens of graves in a Jewish cemetery.

The community, along with families of those whose graves were damaged, has to compile a list of affected gravesites in order to

receive the funds. A recent string of vandalism damaged or destroyed nearly 150 gravestones at St. Petersburg's main Jewish cemetery.

### David Irving arrested in Austria

Holocaust denier David Irving was arrested in Austria. Irving was arrested earlier this month on charges of Holocaust denial, Austrian officials announced Thursday.

Irving is best known for losing a libel lawsuit in 2000 he brought against Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books, after Lipstadt accused Irving of being a Holocaust denier.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Iran satellite can eye Israel

An Iranian satellite can spy on Israel. Iran launched the Russian-made Sina-1 into space last month to monitor natural disasters, but the space program director acknowledged Wednesday to The Associated Press that it also could spy on Israel.

However, he denied it would be put to such a purpose. "We don't need to do it," he said. "You can buy satellite photos of Israeli streets from the market."

An Israeli satellite, Ofek-5, has monitored Iran and Syria since 2002.

### Al-Qaida, Hamas hurting for funds

International efforts to cut off funding to Al-Qaida and Palestinian terrorists are paying off, a U.S. official said.

"Anecdotally, what we're seeing is that we are having a real impact on Al-Qaida and Hamas, both in terms of putting pressure on them financially but also in terms of creating deterrents both for donors to give money to them and how they're able to move money," Stuart Levey, Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in a speech Wednesday in Washington.

### Palestinians stage armed rally

An estimated 1,000 Palestinians staged an armed march in the Gaza Strip.

Defying a ban on the public display of weapons, marchers displayed assault rifles and rocket launchers amid speeches Thursday in which speakers vowed to hold on to their arms to fight Israel.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Travel insurance bill passes House committee

A measure to prevent insurance companies from denying policies to people planning to travel to Israel and other countries was inserted into a terrorism insurance bill.

The Life Insurance Fairness for Travelers Act was inserted into the legislation Wednesday by the House Committee on Financial Services.

The measure requires life insurers to make coverage available for legal foreign travel, and not charge excessive premiums for such travel.

The Terrorism Risk Insurance Act now goes to the House Rules Committee.

### Nixon feared Israeli nuclear weapons

The Nixon administration feared Israel would try to acquire nuclear weapons, recently released documents show.

A memo from 1969, released Wednesday by the National Archives, reported intelligence that Israel was developing the capacity to produce and deploy nuclear weapons, and suggested it could start a Middle East arms race and lead other states to align themselves with Russia.