

## IN THE NEWS

## U.S.: Palestinian vote shouldn't be delayed

The Bush administration wants Palestinian Authority elections to take place Jan. 25 as scheduled, with voting in eastern Jerusalem as well.

"We see no reason why those elections should not proceed on Jan. 25," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Tuesday. "We believe that the Palestinian Authority should be concentrating on preparations for those elections, so that Palestinian people can vote in an atmosphere that is free from violence or coercion or intimidation."

P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas threatened this week to cancel the elections if Israel stops Arabs in eastern Jerusalem from voting.

## D.C. lobbyist enters guilty plea

A prominent U.S. Jewish lobbyist pleaded guilty to criminal charges. Jack Abramoff, until last year Washington's pre-eminent Republican lobbyist, pleaded guilty to three charges Tuesday related to his lobbying on behalf of casinos run by Indian tribes.

The plea suggests that Abramoff is ready to testify against a host of lawmakers, most of them Republican, on bribery charges.

Abramoff is still under investigation in another major case, involving his purchase of casino boats in Florida; he is in negotiations for a plea bargain in that case. There are allegations that he misused money from clients to fund some Jewish charities.

## Israeli airstrike kills 2 Palestinians

The Israeli air force killed two Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip. The Islamic Jihad members were targeted in their car Monday night in the northern Gaza town of Jabalya.

Security sources said one of the men had overseen cross-border rocket launches on behalf of the terrorist group.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Ruined synagogue in New Orleans symbolizes difficulty of rebuilding

By LARRY LUXNER

**N**EW ORLEANS (JTA) — From the outside, Congregation Beth Israel looks like a deteriorating building in a bad neighborhood, with its boarded-up windows, ruined facade and mountains of debris on the sidewalk out front.

The reality is much worse.

Except for the colorful stained-glass windows inside its main sanctuary, almost nothing is left of the 100-year-old Orthodox synagogue. Its once-gleaming floors are littered with pieces of wood and the torn pages of prayer books.

The bimah sits at an angle, not far from a broken felt stool embroidered with the Star of David.

Off to one side, the blue-and-white flag of Israel stands proudly on a flagpole, but the flag itself is stained by a grimy water line that won't go away.

From a Jewish perspective at least, this is Hurricane Katrina's Ground Zero — a historic house of worship reduced to a rotting trash heap by one of the worst natural disasters ever to strike the United States.

"We're in a state of flux right now," said Marshall Gerson, past president of Beth Israel. "We had the only daily minyan in New Orleans. But even before the hurricane, we were financially on the ropes."

But there's no doubt things have gotten much, much worse — and the damage at Beth Israel is, of course, only one measure of the overall damage caused by Katrina.

Although only four Louisiana Jews died as a result of the August 2005 storm — the statewide death toll is 1,079 — Katrina's

impact on the Jewish community will be felt for years, economically and emotionally.

Synagogues and other Jewish institutions sustained more than \$20 million in uninsured losses and operational deficits, according to Stillman, and few people carried flood insurance.

Inside Beth Israel's administration office, a Jewish calendar displaying the month of August 2005 still hangs on the wall, its edges eaten away by mold.

In the Joseph Hurwitz Memorial study center down the hall, wooden study benches are upside-down and books are scattered as if the place had been attacked by terrorists.

In a touch of irony, the water line comes right up to a copy of the Acheinu prayer, thumb-tacked to the wall in Hebrew and English.

The prayer says, "If any of our fellow Jews are in jeopardy or are entrapped, whether overseas or at home, may the Almighty take pity on them and deliver them from trouble to relief, from gloom to bright light, and from tyranny to freedom, urgently, swiftly and very soon, and let us say, Amen."

Beth Israel, with 200 member families, is located in the upper-middle-class suburb of Lakeview, which before Katrina was home to more than 15 percent of New Orleans' Jews.

Today Lakeview is a ghost town, with block after block of deserted, condemned houses waiting to be demolished. From the outside these houses look relatively intact, but, like Beth Israel, their insides are completely gutted — the result of having sat

*Continued on page 2*

HELPING  
KATRINA'S  
VICTIMS

## ■ *While some Jews are trickling back to their homes, others will never return*

*Continued from page 1*

under 10 feet of water for a month after the hurricane.

"Structurally we believe this building can be rebuilt, but we don't know if it will be," said Beth Israel official Eddie Gothard. "Between the federal, state and local governments, they're coming up with elevation guidelines, and if you're below a certain elevation, they won't permit you to rebuild. We're waiting on that."

If Beth Israel can be rebuilt, Gothard says it will cost at least \$420,000 just to replace the ductwork and do the necessary plumbing and carpentry work.

"Then you have to disinfect everything," he said, "and for all this you need commercial equipment. There's no electricity in this neighborhood, and it could be that way for a year or more."

Beth Israel is the only Orthodox synagogue in a city where 70 percent of Jews are Reform.

New Orleans also has four Reform temples, one conservative shul and two Chabad centers, though none was as heavily damaged as Beth Israel.

Nor was the local JCC, part of which has been converted temporarily into a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center.

Eric Stillman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, said the city's pre-Katrina Jewish population was around 9,500. About half of the city's Jews fled to Houston ahead of the approaching hurricane, while significant numbers of Jews also

relocated to Baton Rouge, Atlanta, Dallas and Memphis.

As of Dec. 29, about 4,250 Jews — nearly 45 percent of the community — had returned.

"We had 3,600 Jewish households in our database, and we've heard from 2,190 of them," he said. "So far, only 257 households have indicated that they possibly will not return or have decided that they won't return. We continue to see more people indicating that they're coming back, and the numbers will continue to climb."

Mike Stern, 42, an investment adviser, rode out Katrina in the town of Monroe, La., having left with his dog at 3:30 a.m. on the day of the storm.

"I have quite a few elderly Jewish clients who have moved away to where their kids are, and they're probably not coming back," said Stern, who attends Temple Sinai, a Reform congregation in suburban Metairie. "I also know several young Jewish families who are probably not coming back."

Stillman has heard New Orleans leaders predict a net Jewish population loss of 10 percent to 30 percent, though he said the federation doesn't know for sure.

"It's too soon to tell," he said.

But Linda Wakin isn't waiting. Wakin is the owner of Casablanca, a kosher Middle Eastern restaurant in Metairie. Despite having incurred \$180,000 in storm damages, Wakin said she had no choice but to reopen the restaurant as soon as possible.

"I had insurance for the contents, but not for the loss of income," said Wakin, who was born in Nahariya, Israel, but has lived in New Orleans for the past 26 years.

Her husband, Shimon, added, "The reason we reopened was also to bring the Jews back to New Orleans."

Wakin said business has been gradually returning to Casablanca, helped in part by the throngs of young Jewish volunteers who have descended on New

Orleans to help rebuild homes and synagogues in Katrina's wake.

"I have a lot of friends who live here, and right now they're desperate," said Ashley Klapper, assistant director of the Baltimore-based Jewish Volunteer Connection. "A lot of Jewish people have small businesses, and those people can't just pick up and leave. They had an income that had allowed them to live in a certain style. Now they have nothing."

Elissa Bluth, whose house took in more than four feet of water following the hurricane, said she and her husband,

Edward, a radiologist, carried \$250,000 worth of flood insurance and \$100,000 in insurance to cover material losses.

But their house was valued at between \$600,000 and \$1 million.

"If devastation could be measured on a scale of 1 to 10," said Bluth, sitting in the living room of her daughter Marjorie's rented house, "we were at 9.9."

Adam Bronstone, a federation official assigned to coordinate post-Katrina volunteer efforts for the Jewish community, says both FEMA and the Red Cross "have done a ridiculously bad job," noting that the Federal Emergency Management Administration has delivered only 16 percent of the trailers promised to New Orleans residents whose houses were wiped out by Katrina.

"The reality is that, yes, every day things get a little better, but it'll take a long time. I'd like to say that five years from now this will all be a memory, but it simply can't be," he said.

"The mental anguish people have gone through in the last few months is indescribable. The only people who really understand us are Holocaust survivors."

Bronstone added: "New Orleans is like the Wild West. It's not for the faint of heart. We thought the water would be here a lot longer, like two or three months. If it had, you could have just padlocked New Orleans and thrown away the key, because it wouldn't exist." ■

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**Adam Bronstone**

Jewish Federation of New Orleans

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# Israeli families pay price for increased violence

By GIL SEDAN

HAIFA (JTA) — “Suddenly I receive a telephone call: My brother, Avinoam, is dead. Impossible, I say to myself: Avinoam, my kid brother, murdered?”

It was a lovely April day when a young couple went down to the popular Nirvana beach in Haifa with their two dogs for a stroll and a cup of coffee. It was the last day in the life of Avinoam Shoshan, 31. He was murdered, on the beach promenade, in front of hundreds of people.

Why? Because Shoshan’s dog got into a fight with another dog. It was too much of an insult for the owner of the other dog, so he pulled a knife and stabbed Shoshan to death.

Almost three years have passed, but Ziva Shulav, Shoshan’s sister, relives that day over and over again.

She was one of the key speakers at a December symposium on violence in Israeli society, held in Haifa, organized by the municipality and the Ibn-Khaldoun Society for the Advancement of Democracy.

“Everyone talks about political terrorism,” Shulav said, “but people in Israel are also subject to civil terrorism, and this is often accepted as an inevitable divine punishment.”

“We talk a lot about the symptoms for this phenomenon, but not enough about the causes of violence,” said Gideon Fishman, head of Haifa University’s Minerva Center for the Study of Youth. “If we do not explore the causes, nothing will help — neither more policemen nor more punitive measures.”

The sociological explanations are numerous, and not necessarily convincing: Police and military brutality against Palestinians has spilled over to Israel proper, and is manifested by wilder driving habits and a propensity to violence; the large immigration from the former Soviet Union has led to more alcoholism in Israel, thus raising the number of alcohol-related acts of violence; the abundance of drugs — according to government statistics, every 10th Israeli youth is exposed to drugs — helps instigate acts of violence.

Israelis adore America: They like to dress American-style and are addicted to American cinema, junk food and music. But until a few years ago, stories of violence in America were dismissed as some-

thing that “could not happen here.”

No more. Stories such as Shoshan’s murder have become a matter of routine. According to police, in the northern part of the country alone a murder takes place every seven and a half days, a rape every 10 days, a bodily assault every 30 minutes.

On the national level, police last year recorded a rise of 3.2 percent in physical violence, following five years of continuous decrease. An increase of 4.9 percent was reported in cases of violence against minors.

Some 18.5 percent of crimes in the first six months of 2005 were crimes of violence, compared to 17.3 percent in the same period last year. Police have opened 15,606 files on suspicion of violence, compared to 13,253 last year.

Tzahi Ya’acov, 16, was stabbed to death last February in the middle of a mall because he drew the attention of another minor to a 100-shekel bill — about \$25 — on the shelf of a shoe store.

“I want to see the man who will dare touch this bill,” said the youth, and his friend went over to Tzahi and stabbed him.

Other stories abound: Ronni Ruhana, 41, from an Arab village near Haifa, was allegedly gunned down by a neighbor, a border policeman, because Ruhana’s brother had separated from the neighbor’s sister and refused to pay the alimony demanded.

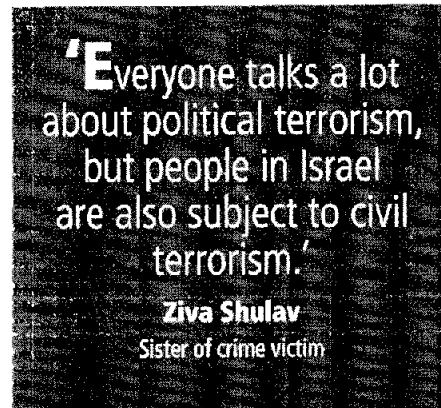
A recent survey conducted by Haifa University’s sociology department showed that out of 800 interviewees — half of them Arab, half of them Jewish — some 38 percent said the level of violence has increased in their neighborhoods.

In addition, 45 percent said anyone can easily get a weapon, though possession of arms in Israel is strictly licensed, and 72 percent said punishment of violent criminals is too light.

There was one hopeful finding in the survey: Only 3 percent of respondents said they had experienced violence themselves. The figure was slightly higher — 5 percent — among Arab respondents.

“These are more or less the figures,” Dov Lutzky, deputy commander of Israel’s Northern Police Command, told JTA. “Violence is on an upward trend, but it’s not as dramatic as it may seem listening to testimonies in the symposium.”

“The worst case of violence is in the Arab sector,” said lawyer Sylvia Freiman, the district attorney for northern Israel. “Arabs often have a mentality of ‘we’ and ‘them,’ and refuse to seek the



help of the police.”

As’ad Ghanem, head of the Ibn-Khaldoun Association, said he no longer reprimands young drivers who drive too fast, because “I’m afraid they will come out and beat me with a club.”

Ziva Shulav and other bereaved families have set up a society of Families of Murder Victims, similar to groups in the United States and United Kingdom.

“They have societies for terror victims, they have societies for women who were subject to violence, they have societies for the rehabilitation of prisoners, but the state has forgotten the victims of regular everyday violence. These families remain on their own,” said Lara Zinneman of Haifa, whose daughter Ganit was murdered 10 years ago by an American student at Haifa University. “The society is obsessively preoccupied with the murderer, but ignores the victims and his family.”

Ziva Shulav says that when she attended the shiva for Mayan Sapir, a 15-year-old who was murdered and raped by a 16-year-old in Rishon Lezion, Sapir’s mother begged Shulav’s forgiveness.

“‘When I read about your brother’s murder,’ she said, ‘I felt sorry for the family, but just like everyone else I continued to go about my business. I beg for forgiveness for having failed to get up and cry in protest,’” Shulav recalled.

Shoshan’s murderer was sentenced to 18 years in jail. In the Ruhana murder, the verdict is to be handed down soon — but for now the alleged murderer’s father still walks around his village, proudly waving his gun.

**FOCUS ON  
ISSUES**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Likud to quit Cabinet

The Likud Party plans to resign from Israel's government Sunday. Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu announced the walkout Tuesday, saying Likud ministers would tender resignations at the next weekly Cabinet meeting.

The move has been expected since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon quit the Likud last year to form his new, centrist Kadima Party.

"The Likud must serve as an alternative to the Sharon government's policies," Netanyahu said in a statement. The Likud lags in opinion polls behind Kadima and the Labor Party ahead of the March 28 general election.

Kadima ministers will take over the Likud's portfolios as a caretaker Cabinet.

### Omri Sharon quits Knesset

Ariel Sharon's son resigned from the Knesset. Omri Sharon, who is awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty in a Likud Party funding scandal, tendered his resignation Tuesday.

The move is unlikely to affect the prime minister's chances of re-election in the March 28 ballot, since Ariel Sharon quit the Likud to form the new Kadima Party. Omri Sharon, 41, admitted to illicitly funding his father's 1999 run for the Likud leadership.

He faces a maximum prison term of seven years, though lawyers have argued that the sentence should be reduced. A related case against the prime minister was dropped for lack of evidence.

### Hebron squatters ordered out

Israeli police served eviction notices to settlers who took over a Palestinian market.

The notices were served Tuesday to eight settler families who had squatted in abandoned market-stalls in Hebron since 2001. They have until Jan. 15 to leave or face arrest. The stalls are on land owned by Jews who fled Arab rioting in 1929, but Israel's Civil Administration said the squatters had not proven personal claims to the property, and therefore had to go.

Police who came to deliver the eviction notices scuffled with settlers, at least two of whom were arrested.

### Jerusalem campaigning blocked

Israeli police detained a Palestinian Authority parliamentary candidate in Jerusalem.

Mustafa Barghouti, an independent candidate in the Jan. 25 ballot, was taken in for questioning Tuesday after illegally campaigning in eastern Jerusalem. Police also confiscated campaign posters from another candidate, Hanan Ashrawi. Tuesday marked the launch of campaigns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas threatened to postpone the ballot if Israel bars Jerusalem Arabs from voting.

### Temple Mount synagogue charge

Israel's Islamic Movement accused Jews of secretly building a synagogue under the Al-Aksa Mosque.

Movement leader Sheik Raed Salah claimed Tuesday that Jews have prayed in a five-room complex built under cover of excavations on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, 100 yards from the site of Al-Aksa. Salah has a history of fabricating incendiary charges about the Temple Mount to whip up Muslim anger against Israel, and Israel's Antiquities Authority said his latest salvo had no basis in reality.

"Archaeological excavations have never been carried out, and are not being carried out today, under the Temple Mount compound," it

said in a statement. Salah's accusation was echoed by Ikrima Sabri, the Palestinian Authority-appointed mufti of Jerusalem, who said the Temple Mount had never housed Jewish shrines.

### Rabbi's son jailed

The son of an Israeli chief rabbi was jailed.

Tel Aviv District Court sentenced Meir Amar, son of Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, to 32 months in prison Tuesday after he admitted to kidnapping and beating a 17-year-old who had courted his sister, Ayala.

The court decided not to convict Amar's wife, Mazar, even though it said there was a "reasonable basis" to believe she knew of the plot.

Rabbi Amar has denied any knowledge of the case. His son was ordered to pay the abused youth \$8,000 in damages.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Holocaust Museum launches podcast

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum will podcast commentaries on genocide.

"Programs will provide the latest information on global humanitarian crises, from the genocide in Darfur to ongoing efforts to address genocide worldwide," said Jerry Fowler, director of the museum's committee on conscience, who will host the podcasts. "We hope people will not only access these broadcasts, but join us in our fight against genocide."

Programs may be streamed from [www.ushmm.org/conscience/podcasts](http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/podcasts).

### Anti-Semitic claims disputed in Pennsylvania

Claims by a Pennsylvania Jewish couple that they're suffering anti-Semitic harassment are being disputed.

Mike and Paula Barber of Luzerne Township, Pa., say neighbors have poisoned their dogs, drawn swastikas on their house and tried to burn down the house because they're Jewish, The Associated Press reported. But neighbors say the Barbers are raising the claims to distract people from their noisy dog-kennel operation.

## WORLD

### Using sex to sell Israel in England

Israel launched an ad campaign in Britain that uses sex appeal to sell tourism to the Jewish state.

The campaign, which began Dec. 26 on Sky TV and will include widespread advertisements in the media, taxis, buses and subways, features women in scantily clad outfits.

"We felt there was a need to change the way people think about Israel beyond the traditional, cultural and religious experience it has to offer," Uzi Gafni, director of the Israeli government's tourism office in the United Kingdom and Ireland, was quoted as saying.

### Prize honors Israeli environmentalist

Israeli environmentalist Alon Tal won the \$100,000 Charles Bronfman Prize.

Tal, 45, who immigrated to Israel from the United States, founded the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies and the Israel Union for Environmental Defense. Tal is an "outstanding environmental visionary who set out to change the world and has actually done so," prize granters said in announcing the award.

Tal recently was appointed by Israel's Foreign Ministry to the Israeli governmental delegation to the United Nations on deserts.