

IN THE NEWS

Putin: I'll invite Hamas to Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he intends to invite Hamas officials to Moscow.

"We are ready in the near future to invite the Hamas authorities to Moscow to hold talks," Putin told reporters Thursday during a visit to Spain. "We have not considered Hamas a terrorist organization. Today we must recognize that Hamas has achieved power in Palestine as a result of legitimate elections and we must respect the choice of the Palestinian people."

The announcement was welcomed by the radical Islamic group but bemoaned by Israeli officials.

Three killed in Gaza clashes

Israeli soldiers killed three Palestinian terrorists on Israel's boundary with the Gaza Strip.

The gunmen were shot dead Thursday while trying to storm the Erez crossing from Gaza into Israel.

Hours later, soldiers shot dead a Palestinian who tried to plant a bomb on a road near Erez.

Boycotts conference postponed after furor

A conference on academic boycotts whose validity had been questioned was postponed after pressure from its funders.

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Bush meets Israeli minister

President Bush held an unscheduled meeting with visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

Livni was in the White House for talks with administration officials Thursday when they were unexpectedly joined by Bush.

Livni and Bush are believed to have spoken for more than an hour, mainly about the ramifications of Hamas' win in last month's Palestinian elections.

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WORLD REPORT

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Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

New Yorkers line up outside a food pantry affiliated with the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty in September 2003.

Jewish social service agencies brace for more cuts as budget

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jewish social service agencies, still reeling from recent funding cuts, are bracing for another round with this week's launch of the annual budget process.

President Bush outlined his \$2.77 trillion budget Monday, which includes a \$36 billion cut in Medicare over the next five years and a \$13.6 billion reduction from Medicaid over the same period.

The proposal also includes \$2.5 billion in aid to Israel. And it leaves open the possibility that \$150 million in U.S. funds to Palestin-

ians the West Bank and Gaza Strip will be cut because of Hamas' victory last month in the Palestinian parliamentary elections.

The domestic spending cuts could have a strong impact on Jewish social service programs, which have faced similar budget cuts and costly regulatory changes in recent years. Many programs have been forced to seek other avenues of funding to offset the shortfall from federal coffers, or to cut programs altogether.

Jewish homes for senior citizens and hospitals will be among those hardest hit.

Medicaid, which is the largest funding

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ *Bush's proposed budget would cut deeply into Jewish social services programs*

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source for Jewish nursing homes and hospitals, provides an estimated \$2 billion a year.

"It's going to cause the Jewish homes to have a shortfall of revenue," said Harvey Tillipman, president and CEO of the Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America.

The budget proposal calls for increased funds for domestic security and national defense. It also asks Congress to approve \$300 billion in tax cuts in the next five years.

Among the other highlights in the president's proposed budget:

- \$100 million for vouchers for students to use to attend private schools. These programs are opposed by numerous Jewish groups, but backed by the Orthodox community, which seek federal dollars for day school programs. Congress has traditionally struck down funds for national voucher programs.

- A \$500 million reduction in Social Service Block Grants and a \$630 million reduction in Community Services Block Grants. Both programs give money, through the states, to Jewish programs. The social service grants fund immigrant, elderly and children's programming. The community grants aid to low-income populations.

- An increase of more than \$600 million for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Many of the earmarks for specific programs of interest to the Jewish community are added by lawmakers in Congress

when they tackle the budget. They are not in the president's budget proposal. There is some hope that many of the proposed cuts in programs will be salvaged by Congress. That has happened in the past.

Tillipman said it is too soon to tell the specific impact that the proposed Medicare and Medicaid cuts will have on Jewish aging services.

Nursing homes are still trying to grapple with new cuts came from last year's budget, which was just passed into law last week after a prolonged budget battle.

One new regulation passed last week bars a Medicaid applicant from receiving coverage for five years after he or she has transferred assets to a family member or a charity. The wait used to require two years.

And nursing home residents will now have to wait until they have entered a home to apply for coverage, a move the Congressional Budget Office predicts will lead to expensive delays in payment.

There also now will be a cap on Medicare coverage of nursing home stays. Now, homes will receive only \$1,740 per resident per year. One facility, the Menorah Park Center for Senior Living in Beachwood, Ohio, estimated the cap would cost them at least \$250,000 each year.

"It's the combination of all these things," Tillipman said. "It creates a problem for Jewish homes to be able to finance services for those who are indigent and don't have the ability to pay."

He said fund-raising will need to increase dramatically, and the cost of services will increase for those who can afford to pay it.

The White House says the Medicaid and Medicare cuts will allow the programs to be more cost-efficient, and be sustainable for a longer period of time. Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt said Monday that the quality of care would not be reduced.

"Medicare is simply not sustainable in the long-term in its present form," Leavitt said. "So we have proposed modest steps to strengthen and modernize Medicare, and to reduce the burden of entitlement

spending on future generations."

Congressional Democrats are likely to fight the cuts, and some Republicans have expressed reservations about cutting taxes and services, especially before the mid-year elections.

Jewish community programs that help the poor and the aging will also likely

be affected by the block grant cuts. The federation system is a large recipient of these funds.

The White House said Monday they are cutting the programs because they do not reward grants on a competitive basis, and because they are not directed at programs that achieve results.

William Daroff, vice president for public policy at the United Jewish Communities, the federation umbrella, said he is "deeply concerned" about the block grant cuts.

"Obviously, the executive branch's budget request is just that, a request, a starting point for the debate," he said. "As the budget process moves forward in Congress, we look forward to working with our allies in both parties to restore and expand programs critical to the Jewish federation system's network of social service providers."

The foreign aid earmarks, which have become standard in recent years, may be controversial this year because of Hamas' victory.

The \$2.5 billion in economic and military aid for Israel is part of a total foreign aid request of \$23.7 billion, up \$2.86 billion up from last year.

Israel would receive \$2.34 billion in military aid, an increase of \$60 million from last year, along with \$120 million in economic aid, which is half of what it received last year. The changes are part of a 10-year aid restructuring plan President Clinton signed with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The \$150 million slated for the West Bank and Gaza is the same as last year's request, but twice what Palestinians received when Yasser Arafat was president of the Palestinian Authority. The Bush administration said that funding was being reviewed "in light of recent legislative elections."

Oviously, the executive branch's budget request is just that, a request, a starting point for the debate.

William Daroff

Vice president, United Jewish Communities

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Jewish students fight Israel divestment forum

By DAVID J. SILVERMAN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish students at Georgetown University are preparing for a pro-Palestinian conference that has created unrest at other U.S. campuses in recent years.

The Palestine Solidarity Movement will hold its fifth annual conference on the Georgetown campus from Feb. 17-19, to demand that colleges divest from Israel and from corporations with financial connections to the Jewish state.

In response, the an umbrella organization for Jewish groups has been working with Georgetown students to produce their own events. Aaron Goldberg, associate director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, said there will be programs with public officials, forums with Israeli and Arab diplomats, and a pro-Israel cultural program.

Last month, University President John DeGioia told the faculty at his annual "town hall meeting" that he does not support divestment from Israel. His statement came shortly after he visited the Jewish state to meet with his Israeli counterparts about increasing cooperation between their universities and Georgetown.

"Divestment is a useless idea," said Georgetown senior Jonathan Aires, chair of the school's spring pro-Israel festival. "It's a non-starter and almost a total majority of the students on campus understand that. President DeGioia's statement did nothing but reaffirm that."

But the university has run into criticism for accepting a \$20 million grant — the second-largest single gift in the school's history — from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz al Saud last year.

This is the same Saudi prince who offered \$10 million to then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani for the families of uniformed victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Giuliani spurned the offer when he learned that the prince had linked the terrorist attacks to U.S. support for Israel.

Erik Smulson, assistant vice president for communications at Georgetown, where Jews make up about 10 percent of the overall student population of 6,500, said there is no connection between the prince's gift and the university's decision

to allow the conference onto its campus. He said the Palestine Solidarity Movement has the right to hold the conference under the university's free speech and expression policy.

The annual conference has spawned concern among pro-Israel activists in past years, but has rarely become the spectacle that Jewish groups have feared. Taking a lesson from past experiences, student activists at Georgetown say they are not overreacting to the Palestinian group's presence.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

The Palestine Solidarity Movement is an umbrella organization for college groups in the United States and Canada. Student spokesman Nadeem Muaddi said the group does not endorse or condone violence, but seeks divestment from Israel. "We don't endorse, we don't support and we don't condone any violence, no matter who is perpetrating it," said Muaddi. "We focus on boycotting and divestment strategies because we feel they are the most peaceful strategies for a fair and just solution in the Middle East."

He said he hopes for more than 600 people to attend, including students, young professionals, and people from communal and religious organizations. Muaddi said there were about 500 last year; Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld of Ohav Shalom Talmud Torah Congregation in Washington countered that the conference never attracts more than 150 people.

In the past, the Palestine Solidarity Movement was more radical, and refused to condemn violent acts against Israelis. One of the group's guiding principles, adopted in 2002, states "as a solidarity movement, it is not our place to dictate the strategies adopted by the Palestinian people in their struggle for liberation."

Earlier this winter, however, the group voted to abandon the guiding principles, as they were no longer necessary to its goals of expansion, Muaddi said.

Despite the movement's ostensible shift toward peaceful rhetoric, Jewish leaders are concerned that the group invites radicals to its convocations on

some of the most prestigious American campuses. It is also committed to ending all U.S. aid to Israel and to upholding the right of return of all Palestinian refugees to Israel, according to the movement's Web site.

"This is a far-left organization in sympathy with radical Palestinian nationalism, and with the use of violence against Israeli citizens," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, a

Philadelphia think tank. He warned that the group goes "way beyond the pale for acceptable discourse."

No public universities have divested from Israel to date, but the movement has made headway with some Protestant churches. The Presbyterian Church USA has called for divestment from the Jewish state.

In 2003, plans for a divestment conference at Rutgers University led to an "atmosphere of intimidation" on campus, said Danielle Joseph, then-student director of religious and ritual affairs at Rutgers Hillel.

"It was intensely difficult to be an openly pro-Israel Jew on campus, and sometimes, even Jewish," she said. Joseph said it was commonplace to see posters all over campus equating Zionism with racism.

The conference was later moved to Ohio State University.

Speakers at the Georgetown conference include Sue Blackwell of Birmingham University, who led the academic boycott of Israel last year in Great Britain.

'It was intensely difficult to be an openly pro-Israel Jew on campus.'

Danielle Joseph
Rutgers Hillel

New Jersey gets Jewish museum

NEW JERSEY (JTA) — A Jewish museum is being built in central New Jersey.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Monmouth County is building the museum in an early 19th-century barn, located in a shopping center, reports Farmingdale's News Transcript.

The barn once belonged to the family of Jonas Solomon, a prominent merchant in the area at the time.

Bukharian Jews walk tightrope in U.S.

By SHIRA SCHOENBERG

NEW YORK (JTA) — David Abayev is a successful Manhattan accountant. He attended American schools, wears hip professional clothes, sips coffee at Starbucks, and speaks perfect English, with little indication that, until 1991, he lived in Uzbekistan.

But Abayev has a different mind-set about family than most of his coworkers. At 29, he still lives with his parents because in Bukharian Jewish culture, adults leave home only to begin their own family.

Abayev wants to get married, but first he must find a Bukharian Jewish woman who meets his parents' approval. He will not have premarital sex and will live with a woman only after marriage.

Although Abayev admits to feeling tempted to move away from his parents' watchful eyes, "I really can't do that," he says. "If you leave you're hurting yourself. You may find a job and girlfriend but you won't have a family connection. You won't have bachsh," a traditional Bukharian dish, on Friday night.

Abayev is one of 40,000 to 50,000 Bukharian Jews in Queens — some are scattered

in other cities across North America — who struggle to maintain their identity while confronting the economic and cultural pressures of the United States. The struggle is most apparent among young Bukharian Jews, most of whom left Uzbekistan in Central

Asia after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and are now trying to define their identity away from the surroundings that shaped their heritage and traditions.

"When a child becomes a teen, he asks the question, 'What does it mean to be a Bukharian Jew?'" says Imanuel Rybakov, chairman of the Association of Bukharian Jewish Youth of the USA — Achdut. "What's the difference between us and others?" And sometimes parents can't explain."

For some, defining their identity means using newfound religious freedom and knowledge to rediscover their ancestors' Orthodox Jewish past. Isabella Roberts, youth committee coordinator for the Bukharian Jewish Congress, said 10 percent of the community is becoming

Orthodox; others estimate closer to 30 percent.

But for the majority in the tight-knit community, being a Bukharian Jew increasingly means emphasizing cultural traditions, creating organizations to perpetuate knowledge of Bukharian Jewish history, food, music and family values.

This March the community will dedicate a new Jewish Community Center in Forest Hills, to house a synagogue, the Bukharian Jewish Congress, a group led by Israeli philanthropist Lev Leviev, himself a Bukharian Jew, and other community organizations.

The challenges of remaining a traditional Bukharian Jew in the U.S. are great. Economic pressures also weigh heavily.

Sulayman Penkhasov, 25, a barber, watched his two younger sisters begin to observe Shabbat and keep kosher.

Although Penkhasov keeps many traditions, his job prevents him from following his sisters' lead. On Friday night, he eats Shabbat dinner with his family. On Saturday, he works as a barber, a common profession for Jews from Uzbekistan.

"As soon as I'm making enough money so I don't have to work Saturdays, I'll keep Shabbat the way it's supposed to be," he said. "It's in my mind and my heart, but money talks."

Some immigrants are turning to the Orthodox Judaism of their grandparents to maintain their identity.

One Friday night at the home of Larissa Mullodzhanova, 20, Shabbat candles were lit and the table was set. A home-cooked feast with Bachsh and Oshi Piyozl brought smells of Uzbekistan into the Queens apartment.

Mullodzhanova's husband arrived home from synagogue, and her sisters walked over.

In Uzbekistan, the families observed Jewish holidays. Mullodzhanova's brother-in-law, Boris Abramov, 24, grew up hearing stories of his grandfather, who spent 25 years in Soviet jails for selling kosher meat. But it was not until they arrived in the U.S. and attended Jewish day schools that they learned the laws and reasons behind the traditions and started

FOCUS
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Shabbat is 'in my
mind and my heart,
but money talks.'

Sulayman Penkhasov

Bukharian barber



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Members of the Achdut youth ensemble play at a Queens College Hillel party, A Night in Bukhara, on Dec. 1, 2005.

keeping them strictly.

"Our generation is more religious than our parents," Abramov said.

But Orthodoxy is not for most Bukharian Jews. Many of these Jews find identity through culture — eating Bukharian Jewish food, listening to traditional music, learning their ancestors' history, or dating other Bukharian Jews.

Abayev talks passionately about attending celebrations with Bukharian music, eating traditional home-cooked food, welcoming guests and spending Friday night dinners with family.

"Bukharian culture is part of you," he said. "To change would be partial suicide."

Some young adults are starting organizations to keep their culture alive.

Peter Pinkhasov, 28, founded BukharianJews.com, a Web site with 950 registered members who chat, view photos, listen to music and read about Bukharian Jewish history, traditions and culture.

Today, the site has spawned other activities.

Rybakov, 23, a Queens College finance major, founded Achdut in 2002, a cultural organization that targets 16-to-35-year-old Bukharian Jews, running festivals, lectures, a band, political volunteering and online classes in the Bukharian Jewish language, a dialect of Farsi. Discussions can attract 100 people, Rybakov said, and dance parties nearly 500.

Both see signs that the youth are retaining their heritage. Pinkhasov estimates 70 percent of young Bukharian Jews attend synagogue on High Holidays.

Rybakov said 80 percent of those who get engaged keep the ritual of shirini huri, a party that includes eating sweets, Bukharian music, dress and dancing. Almost all celebrate the Passover seder with Bukharian Jewish songs, food, clothing and ritual.

The efforts of these youth parallel activities in the larger community. In May 2004, Aron Aranov, 66, created a three-room Bukharian Jewish museum in the Gymnasia, a tuition-free yeshiva in Queens funded by Leviev, hoping that Abayev, Abramov and their young counterparts would visit. It showcases paintings of Bukharian Jewish musicians, bright silk robes and embroidered gold kipot.

"We lost our environment that kept us afloat as an ethnic group," Aronov said. "I didn't want my people to disappear from the world without leaving any trace." ■

Bukharian Jews' long, mixed history

By SHIRA SCHOENBERG

NEW YORK (JTA) — The history of Bukharian Jews of Uzbekistan is a bit murky.

There is no documentation to prove it, but Bukharian Jews trace their history to the Jewish migration to the Persian Empire after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. There is evidence that in the 16th century, Bukhara became a center for the Jewish population in Central Asia and the community took on the name Bukharian Jews.

After the second half of the 19th century, the region increasingly fell under Russian rule, and Bukharian Jews were subject to the sporadic anti-Semitism that flared up elsewhere in the Russian Empire.

Ashkenazi Jews from the European sections of Russia began to settle in the region. Many were engineers, doctors or lawyers, and they provided the area's first generation of local intelligentsia.

Bukharian Jews welcomed the Russian Revolution of 1917, which guaranteed civil liberties to all, but the reality proved to be harsher.

From the 1930s on, Jews maintained traditional practices secretly despite state-sponsored atheism.

Jewish educational, cultural and religious centers in Uzbekistan were closed

during Soviet purges of religion. Jewish government officials, clergy, writers and teachers were fired, arrested or executed for advancing Jewish practices and culture. Farms were shut down, schools and most synagogues were closed, and publications in the Bukharian Jewish language (a dialect of Farsi) ceased.

After World War II, Jews faced extortion and the threat of imprisonment or execution on false charges. In the predominantly Muslim country, anti-Semitism intensified after the founding of the State of Israel and the 1967 War.

Children attended school on Shabbat. Few Jews of any age attended synagogue, because doing so could cost worshippers a job.

Despite these strictures, Bukharian Jews enjoyed more freedom than elsewhere in the Soviet Union and families were able to keep traditions privately.

Parents cooked Bukharian Jewish food, Jews formed tight-knit communities and married only among themselves.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan's economy deteriorated, and Islamic fundamentalism grew. The Jewish community emigrated en masse to Israel and the United States.

"There was no future for Bukharian Jewish children in Uzbekistan," said Peter Pinkhasov, founder of BukharianJews.com. ■



Bukharian Jew Sulayman Penkhasov cuts hair at Executive Hairstylists in 2005 in New York. Although he would like to keep Shabbat, Saturday is his busiest work day.

Academic boycotts forum delayed due to bias

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Acceding to pressure from funders, an American association of professors has indefinitely postponed a conference on academic boycotts whose balance and credibility had come under doubt.

After an initial decision to press on, the American Association of University Professors announced late Wednesday that it was delaying the conference, originally scheduled for next week in Italy, after taking heat for inviting a number of professors who have in the past supported boycotts of Israeli academics.

The controversy over the conference represents the latest battle over Israel and Israel boycotts in academia, where Jewish groups have long charged there is an anti-Zionist and anti-Israel bias.

Questions about the conference intensified earlier this week after an article by a Holocaust denier was distributed in a pre-conference packet — an error the AAUP's general-secretary told JTA had left the organization "shamefaced."

"All three of our funders — the Ford, Rockefeller and Nathan Cummings foundations — urged us to postpone it, let the air clear, as it were — regroup," Roger Bowen said.

He said the foundations never threatened to pull funding, adding that he still hoped to hold the conference eventually.

Of 21 academics accepting invitations to the conference, about eight had previously supported academic boycotts of Israel, those with knowledge of the conference's guest list say.

The decision to postpone was praised by Jewish groups and by the funders.

"We agree with the AAUP decision to postpone the conference," the Rockefeller Foundation said in a statement e-mailed to JTA. "It is clear that concerns raised, including those of the original funders, the Ford and Cummings Foundations, demonstrate that the meeting would not be able to serve its original goals."

When the AAUP initially put together the conference, the group was planning to battle-test its position opposing academic boycotts — boycotts that often focus on Israel. Its leaders didn't realize that they'd shortly be fighting for the meeting's life.

That's because when the list of at-

tendees was released, some in the Jewish world noticed that some of the attendees supported boycotts of Israeli academics. They raised questions about the validity and make-up of the conference, but because of limits on space and time, the list could not be changed.

"At some point, I received an e-mail and saw that there were eight or nine names that looked familiar — and I checked them and they were in favor of boycotting Israel," said Jonathan Rynhold, a professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University who was scheduled to attend the conference.

"I couldn't understand why you needed eight or nine people whose sole aim in life was to demonize and delegitimize Israel and for whom academic freedom is a secondary concern."

Then things got worse for the AAUP.

Earlier this week, an article by a known Holocaust denier claiming that the Nazis did not intend to inflict mass violence on Jews when it took power was included

in a pre-conference informational packet. Questions from both Jewish and non-Jewish participants about the credibility of the conference as a forum for honest intellectual exchange intensified.

On Tuesday, the conference's funding foundations came out with calls to postpone proceedings. Initially, the AAUP resisted the calls.

"Only by engaging our critics in conversation and debate can we attempt to persuade them to consider another perspective," Bowen said at the time.

But the following day the AAUP announced its decision to postpone the conference.

Bowen said inclusion of the Holocaust article — "The Jewish Declaration of War on Nazi Germany: The Economic Boycott of 1933," by M. Raphael Johnson — was an "egregious error." He suspects that it made its way into the packet when a staffer did a Google search on academic boycotts and simply printed up whatever he or she found without first reading it.

In April 2005, the Association of University Teachers in Great Britain voted to boycott two Israeli universities, Haifa and Bar-Ilan. Shortly thereafter, the AAUP issued a statement denouncing academic boycotts as threats to academic freedom.

The conference in Italy was an effort "to subject that statement to an open airing among people we knew would not necessarily agree, but nonetheless we saw this as a teaching moment," Bowen said. "Our long-term goal is to get the global scholarly community to condemn academic boycotts."

Politically unbalanced conferences, panels and debates that ignore the mainstream point of view are routine in academia, said Daniel Pipes, founder and director of the Middle East Forum, a Philadelphia think tank that runs the controversial Campus Watch, which reviews and critiques Middle East studies on American campuses.

The AAUP flap "shows again how the academy needs adult supervision," Pipes said. "There need to be checks

from the outside world. They're off on a left-wing tangent that at times goes overboard and gets noticed and rebuffed."

Kenneth Stern, a specialist in anti-Semitism and extremism at the American Jewish Committee, said that while the AAUP's intentions were good, its read of the political component of the conference may have been lacking.

"There's perhaps a naivete associated with this whole thing — that they would get some others to change their minds," said Stern, who has been following the AAUP issue. "But some of them see themselves as zealots first and academics second."

Bowen didn't disagree with this characterization, noting that, "It's difficult to talk about academic boycotts divorced from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

"We may be guilty of a kind of American liberalism here," he said. "It also may be hubris on our part. But it doesn't make a lot of difference if we're right if a significant part of the academic world doesn't agree."

FOCUS ON ISSUES

'I couldn't understand why you needed eight or nine people whose sole aim in life was to demonize and delegitimize Israel.'

Jonathan Rynhold
Professor, Bar-Ilan University

After 25 years, green synagogues blossom

By JANE ULMAN

ENCINO, Calif. (JTA) — When Rabbi Leah Lewis conducts the Tu B'Shevat seder at Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles this year, congregants will learn about the special qualities of figs, olives and walnuts. They will also learn about the Jewish mandate to be stewards of the earth and, in a departure from previous seders, stewards of their own synagogue.

"People are ready for it," said Lewis, explaining that in only four months the Reform temple, with 710 family units, has created a 10-member Green Team and scheduled an environmental audit to evaluate energy-saving opportunities.

Tu B'Shevat, literally the 15th day of the month of Shevat, which begins at sundown on Feb. 12, is known as the New Year of the Trees. A minor holiday with no prescribed mitzvot, it is often celebrated by planting trees locally or in Israel or by participating in a seder. But more recently it has become a Jewish Earth Day, concentrating on the physical benefits of installing energy-efficient light bulbs, planting native, sustainable landscaping and setting up recycling bins.

Making synagogues eco-friendly, or green, can be traced back to November 1978 when Rabbi Everett Gendler, the father of Jewish environmentalism, climbed on the icy roof of Temple Emanuel in Lowell, Mass., to install solar panels to fuel the ner tamid, or eternal light, in the temple's sanctuary.

"We plugged it almost directly into the sun," said Gendler, now the temple's rabbi emeritus.

After that, a few individual synagogues worked to make their buildings ecologically responsible. Temple Emanuel, a Reform synagogue in Kensington, Md., has been at the environmental forefront since 1989. But in general, Jewish ecological efforts were sparse until after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as Earth Summit.

The following year, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life was created to carry out a Jewish response to the environmental crisis. Recently, the coalition embarked on a Greening Synagogues program in conjunction with GreenFaith, New Jersey's interfaith environmental coalition.

It launched its pilot program in 2004 with four New Jersey synagogues representing the denominational spectrum — Congregation Sharey Tefilo-Israel in South Orange, Bnai Keshet in Montclair, Keshet Community Synagogue of Tenafly and Englewood, and Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell — offering a menu of options in the areas of facilities management, education and worship, and environmental justice and advocacy.

At Agudath Israel, there are now 45 committed Green Team members, according to the program's director, Randi Brokman. The synagogue is planning to rebuild, breaking ground next June and incorporating many energy-saving plans. In the meantime, the membership has managed to reduce disposable waste by 30 percent to 50 percent.

"We have put environmental issues more in the consciousness of congregants. That's the goal," Brokman said.

And that's the coalition's initial goal also. "But ultimately we want this to filter down into homes," Barbara Lerman-Golomb, the coalition's associate executive director, said. "We want this to become second nature to anyone involved in the project, to feel that it's the ethical, moral and Jewish thing to do."

That's also the goal for CoEJLSC, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life of Southern California, an independent affiliate of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. Founded in 1999, the California coalition began its own Green Sanctuaries program around 2001, in conjunction with the Interfaith Environmental Council and 16 pilot congregations, more than half of them Jewish.

Many Jewish texts advocate stewardship of the environment, stemming from the concept of bal taschit, which cautions against waste. This first appears in Deuteronomy 20:19, which prohibits the destruction of fruit trees in wartime.

For many synagogues, greening is not just about fulfilling a spiritual mandate:

It is also about savings. Lee Wallach, co-founder of the California coalition, said that, depending on size and building usage, a synagogue can save up to \$40,000.

At Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel in Boise, Idaho, it is Rabbi Dan Fink who "nags" his congregants into ecological awareness.

Under the leadership of Fink, who is also the co-author of "Let the Earth Teach You Torah," Ahavath Beth Israel took recycling to an extreme when it relocated its entire building. Needing a

larger facility and grounds for its 190-family Reform congregation but not wanting to relinquish its 108-year-old Moorish-style landmark synagogue, it had the 60-ton building hoisted on a flatbed truck in 2003 and moved three miles to the new site. In addition to preserving the building and its materials, Fink said, they redid the "entire infrastructure of the old building so we now have much more energy-efficient heating, cooling and lighting."

For Orthodox synagogues, environmental activism is still new. Canfei Nesharim (the wings of eagles), the first and so far only Orthodox environmental organization, was launched on Tu B'Shevat 2003.

While still at the conceptual stage, according to the organization's executive director, Evonne Marzouk, the volunteer organization is dedicated to educating the Orthodox community about protecting the environment from a halachic perspective. The organization recently published "Compendium of Sources in Halacha and the Environment," and is discovering what Marzouk calls "a great response."

But perhaps the most compelling argument for preserving the environment, quoted by Marzouk and others, is a Midrash in Ecclesiastes Rabbah (7:13). When God first created human beings, He showed them around the Garden of Eden and then warned, "Take care not to corrupt and destroy my world, for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you."

We want this to become second nature to anyone involved in the project, to feel that it's the ethical, moral and Jewish thing to do.

Randi Brokman

Green Team member, Agudath Israel

**HOLIDAY
FEATURE**

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Pollard seeks Supreme Court hearing

Jonathan Pollard asked the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his case. In a petition filed Wednesday, Pollard's attorneys asked the high court to overturn a federal appeals court ruling that denied them access to classified information used to sentence the former U.S. Navy intelligence officer to life in prison for spying for Israel.

Pollard's attorneys said they need to see the documents to make Pollard's case for clemency.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled last year that the federal courts lack jurisdiction to review claims for access to documents for clemency, which the court said is the "president's sole discretion."

Eliot Lauer, one of Pollard's attorneys, said clemency remains Pollard's most viable option for release, and that access to the documents would allow his attorneys to show that many of the supposed repercussions of Pollard's actions never occurred.

Evangelicals join Air Force case

An evangelical Christian group wants to join a U.S. court case challenging the Air Force Academy's alleged Christian climate.

The National Association of Evangelicals petitioned the court Wednesday to intervene in the Air Force's defense of a lawsuit brought by Michael "Mikey" Weinstein, a Jewish Air Force veteran who claims the military imposes Christianity on its recruits.

If the court accepts the petition, the evangelical group would be able to work with the military on its defense and present new facts at a trial.

Kyle Fisk, executive administrator of the National Association of Evangelicals, said Weinstein is seeking the "secularization" of the military.

Jewish card set removes a player

A card was removed from the latest Jewish baseball set after the player informed the set's creators that she is Catholic.

The removal concerned Margaret Wigiser, who played for in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, Sports Illustrated magazine reported.

The league, which was chronicled in the movie "A League of Their Own," operated from 1943 to 1954. The card set is the second one put out by JewishMajorLeaguers.org, with help from the American Jewish Historical Society.

WORLD

Holocaust-cartoon proposal canned

The Danish newspaper at the heart of the Muslim cartoon furor backed off a plan to publish images lampooning the Holocaust.

A senior staffer at the Jyllands-Posten daily, whose 12 images of the Islamic prophet Mohammed have sparked rioting across the Muslim world, proposed this week to run Holocaust cartoons being commissioned by Iran's largest newspaper.

But the editor in chief of Jyllands-Posten, Carsten Juste, issued a statement of clarification, saying his paper "in no circumstances will publish Holocaust cartoons from an Iranian newspaper."

German bank forum moved

A symposium on a German bank's actions during the Holocaust was moved from a Jewish museum in Berlin after criticism from German Jewish leaders.

The Dresdner Bank decided to hold its Feb. 17 symposium at its own foundation, the Eugen-Gutmann Society, following the

complaints, which called the event a way for the bank to achieve forgiveness for its wartime actions.

The brief reportedly reveals the institution's close connections with the Nazi terror apparatus, and its shared responsibility for the Holocaust.

The independent commission of historians, led by Klaus-Dietmar Henke, completed its eight-year research project a few weeks ago.

In a news release, Salomon Korn, vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said he is pleased with the decision.

Group calls for action against Iran

Jewish communities around the world should work with their governments to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the World Jewish Congress said.

Issuing a statement during its board of governors' annual meeting in Jerusalem on Thursday, the WJC said it, too, would work to help in this effort.

Danish-Israeli soccer game on

A soccer game between Israel and Denmark will go on as scheduled despite fears it would be canceled.

The Danish Football Association confirmed this week that it would send a team to Israel for the March game despite concerns that the Danes would cancel the match because of fears of reprisals.

Denmark has been the target of ongoing Muslim protests following the printing of an editorial cartoon by a Danish newspaper that many Muslims find offensive.

German foreign minister to Israel

Germany's foreign minister is to visit Israel next week.

Frank Walter Steinmeier will follow on the heels of German's chancellor, Angela Merkel, who used her visit to Israel to enhance bilateral ties and endorse Israeli views on the threats posed by Iran and by Hamas' election victory in the Palestinian Authority.

Steinmeier is slated to meet with Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Justice and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu and Labor leader Amir Peretz.

MIDDLE EAST

Imam challenges museum

A top Palestinian cleric asked Israel's High Court of Justice to halt the construction of a Simon Wiesenthal Center museum in Jerusalem.

Ikrima Sabri, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, said Thursday he filed a petition against the planned Museum of Tolerance because its construction had led to the desecration of Muslim remains.

The museum is going up in a parking lot abutting the ancient Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem's Mamilla neighborhood.

Ha'aretz this week published accounts of human skeletons that have been uncovered and even damaged by builders, but the project's managers insist that all remains are accorded the proper reverence and are reburied.

The High Court ruling is expected next week.

Replanting trees in the West Bank

The New Israel Fund is sponsoring a replanting of uprooted olive trees in the West Bank.

Monday's activity will bring Israeli and Palestinians together to replant the trees for Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of the Trees.

Thousands of trees have been uprooted or demolished, some by the Israeli government as it builds the West Bank separation barrier and some by settlers angry at Palestinian terrorism.