

IN THE NEWS
**Ehud Olmert,
Cabinet sworn in**

Ehud Olmert and his Cabinet were sworn in Thursday.

The new Israeli prime minister hopes to push through a plan for withdrawing from swathes of the West Bank and setting Israel's borders, unilaterally if necessary in the absence of peace talks with the Palestinians.

"The disengagement from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria was an essential first step in this direction," he said, referring to an initial withdrawal last year, "but the main part is still ahead."

**Swastikas on
Israeli synagogue**

Suspected satanists vandalized an Israeli synagogue. Twenty swastikas, as well as what police described as satanic symbols, were found scrawled over the main synagogue in Petach Tikva on Thursday.

The Torah ark and stacks of prayerbooks were ransacked. Locals said the synagogue previously had been vandalized but never to such an extent.

The discovery last year of a swastika tattoo on an Israeli soldier who had immigrated from the former Soviet Union prompted legislation for a crack-down on neo-Nazis in the Jewish state.

**Travel preserved in
lobbying amendment**

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved an amendment that would protect educational trips from lobbying reform.

The entire bill passed Wednesday night on a narrow, party-line vote of 217-213. Democrats said Republican reforms do not go far enough, but all members agreed to an amendment that permits educational travel.

The Jewish community lobbied hard for the amendment, fearing it could affect education about Israel, Darfur and other areas. The Senate passed a bill with a similar amendment.

WORLD REPORT

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

Democratic staffer, Jewish leader straddles two worlds in Washington

By DAVID J. SILVERMAN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Tom Kahn is at work leading the Democratic staff in the U.S. House of Representatives' Budget Committee, he and Pete Sessions, a veteran Republican congressman from Texas, usually are at odds.

After work, the two buddies regularly find agreement on Israel, anti-Semitism and other issues of concern to the Jewish community.

Sessions says he respects Kahn's expertise in those areas. After all, off the Hill, Kahn is president of the Washington chapter of the American Jewish Committee.

It's not an unusual duality for Kahn, 50, whose commitment to tikkun olam — the Talmudic concept of repairing the world — informs both his jobs.

With the 2006 budget facing its final hurdles in Congress, Kahn has had a low-profile but pivotal role in determining tax and spending priorities across the country.

"The budget really gives me a chance every single day to advocate and to manifest the Jewish values of caring for people who are not able to care for themselves," he told JTA in a recent interview in the AJCommittee's downtown Washington office.

Kahn's Jewish commitment is not lost on his Hill colleagues.

"His Jewish faith is an omnipresent factor," said Rep. John Spratt (D-S.C.), ranking member of the Budget Committee, who has employed Kahn for two decades — an unusually long time in a town known for its rapid turnover.

"It is clear that it is something deeply seeded with Tom," Spratt said. "The convictions he



Office of Tom Kahn

Tom Kahn, director of the Democratic staff in the U.S. House of Representatives' Budget Committee.

tries to act upon every day are rooted in his Jewish faith."

Kahn was content working in a large Wall Street law firm in 1985 when his father abruptly fell ill and died. Suddenly, life seemed too short to be uninspired, he thought.

A year later, the Boston native followed his heart to Washington, where he previously had worked as a junior staffer on Capitol Hill while earning his law degree by night at the Georgetown Law Center. He would pursue his twin passions: public policy and Jewish causes.

"I call it a nice marriage between the two," said the wiry, silver-haired Kahn.

As backstage point man for the minority

Continued on page 2

■ *Kahn works on the House Budget Committee and at the AJCommittee*

Continued from page 1

Democrats on the committee that draws up the blueprint for the national budget, a position he has held for 10 years, Kahn has helped mastermind Democratic opposition to Republican policies.

"He shapes the whole philosophy of what they are going to do," said Sessions, also a close friend of Kahn's who traveled to Israel in 1997 on one of four trips Kahn has co-chaired in the past.

Hill publications routinely recognize Kahn's influence. Roll Call lists him as one of the "Fabulous Fifty" most influential staffers in Congress.

Kahn describes a "relationship of respect and comity" with Budget Committee chairman Jim Nussle (R-Iowa).

Notwithstanding such courtesies, Kahn is forthcoming about his "profound disagreement" with the majority party.

"The Republicans since they've been in charge have been so focused on tax cuts; and 'tax cuts at any price' is what has driven their budget from the beginning," he said.

He blames those cuts for the budget deficit and cuts in programs he and other Democrats consider vital.

Kahn counts as victories Democrat successes in blocking or blunting Republican cuts in housing, Medicaid, Medicare and student loans.

Each year of his tenure, Kahn has overseen the production of a Democratic alternative budget, a proposal that can never be enacted in a Republican-controlled House.

This year's plan, according to Kahn,

calls for more funding for childcare, student loans, veterans' health care, education and environmental protection, and includes a modest set of tax cuts.

In addition to his work at AJCommittee, where he is also national vice-president, Kahn is on the board of the Washington Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and the National Jewish Democratic Council.

He is particularly proud of his service on the board of Project Interchange, a branch of the AJCommittee that sponsors study missions to Israel for journalists, politicians, academics and college student-body presidents.

On the Hill, he is vice president of the Capitol Jewish Forum, a collection of Jewish House and Senate staffers. The group organizes events around the Jewish holidays and holds various classes.

"He really is almost one-of-a-kind as someone who is deeply embedded both in the public sector and in the Jewish world, and uses his connections to better both," said David Bernstein, executive director of the AJCommittee's Washington office.

Raised as a Reform Jew in suburban Boston, Kahn credits his mother and especially his father, a real estate developer and Jewish community center president, with influencing his values.

"My father was a man who was deeply committed to the underdog, deeply committed to helping people who couldn't help themselves. He was also deeply committed as a Jew and as a supporter of Israel," Kahn said.

In 1968, as a precocious 12-year-old, Kahn campaigned on the streets of Boston for one of his greatest heroes, Hubert Humphrey, a strong advocate of both civil rights and Israel.

As an undergraduate at Tufts University, Kahn spearheaded the campus' first Jewish Federation campaign and, at age 19, became the youngest person ever elected to the city council in his hometown of Brookline, Mass.

Kahn spent the year after his college graduation studying in Leningrad, where he was actively involved in assisting Jewish refuseniks.

His activist passions have not diminished, and he counts black-Jewish relations as one of his highest priorities.

He has something of a counterpart in his friend Lorraine Miller, who also wears two hats as president of the Washington Chapter of the NAACP and a senior adviser to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). The AJCommittee and the NAACP work together closely on issues such as the genocide in Darfur and voting rights for the District of Columbia.

Kahn at times relishes the duality. He was married 18 months ago to Susana, a Dominican Jew, in a Jewish ceremony at the Washington hall of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Rabbi Levi Shemtov, Chabad's representative in Washington, married the two. He called Kahn the "epitome" of what a Jewish leader should be.

"Tom is always a man on a mission, and usually leading the mission," he said.

Kahn aided Democratic victories in areas including Medicare and student loans.

JTA
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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Nixon backed off Israeli nukes

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States decided against curbing Israel's nuclear capability in 1969, according to declassified documents. The latest edition of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, drawing on newly released White House papers, reports that Israel had a nuclear bomb by 1967 and that within two years this was discovered by U.S. intelligence.

Senior advisers to President Nixon recommended that he try to check Israel's nuclear program, for fear of destabilizing

the Middle East and bringing confrontation with the Soviet Union closer. But Nixon, who met with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969, decided against applying pressure.

According to the bulletin, in exchange for the U.S. restraint, Israel undertook not to go public with its nuclear capability by not conducting tests or deploying missiles. The policy evolved into the "strategic ambiguity" Israel pursues today with regard to its assumed atomic arsenal.

Indian Jewish community depleted

By SHIRA SCHOENBERG

MUMBAI (JTA) — In many ways, Queenie Mendoza, 34, is a typical success story for ORT India's Vocational Training and Computer Center.

She worked as a servant before entering ORT's beautician program on her employer's recommendation. After graduating, she started a full-time job in the school's salon, and has worked there for 13 years.

But Mendoza is not the type of student the founders had in mind when they established the school 45 years ago: She's Catholic. ORT, the Organization for Educational Resources and Technological Training, is an international Jewish organization with a mandate to help impoverished Jews.

When the school opened in 1961 in Bombay, as this coastal metropolis used to be known, its student population was almost entirely Jewish. Three years ago, its boys' school closed due to a lack of Jewish students. Today, one of 18 girls studying early childhood care and education is Jewish, according to the program's coordinator, a ratio consistent across every other vocational course except computers.

ORT is not the only local school that has seen its Jewish population virtually disappear. Two Mumbai high schools started by Jewish donors, which previously had Hebrew and Torah classes for the Jewish students, also have only a handful of Jewish students left.

Religious schools with diverse student bodies are common in India. Nevertheless, the Mumbai Jewish schools reflect a depleted Jewish community.

When asked about the community's future, ORT India Director Benjamin Isaac said confidently, "We will always have a Jewish presence in Mumbai."

Then he qualified, "At least for the next 15 to 20 years."

In a country where more than 30,000 Jews once lived, only about 5,000 remain, 4,000 of them around Mumbai. To stay open, Jewish schools have had to accept a broader population.

Part of the reason for this, in the case of ORT, is that Mumbai's remaining Jews are leaving blue-collar jobs for fields like management and computers, Isaac said.

Rabbi Joshua Kolet added that for a decade now the Jewish population has been moving to the suburbs, taking away schoolchildren.

But the main factor is emigration, especially to Israel.

"Young people are migrating to Israel because there are better prospects," said Elkan Palkar, 29, head of ORT's computer department. "All families have relatives in Israel."

This doesn't mean Jews have no religious life around Mumbai. ORT sells kosher wine, challah, chicken and baked goods. The American

Jewish Joint Distribution Committee runs a Jewish community center for 500 members who attend classes on Hebrew and Judaism, holiday parties, youth discos and clubs for children and seniors.

Kolet, 36, a Mumbai native and the community's rabbi since 2001, started the Hazon Eli Foundation for Jewish Life in India two years ago to teach Torah, Hebrew and Jewish law in suburban Thane. He runs a Sunday school that attracts about 25 students each week.

But many question whether these measures will re-energize the remnants of a formerly vibrant community.

Even Palkar, who has family in Mumbai and a steady job at ORT, said he would consider leaving. Palkar travels more than an hour by train one Sunday a month to teach Torah in local villages. He visited Israel last summer on birth-right Israel, and said he wants to move for religious reasons.

In Mumbai, he said, synagogues have trouble getting a minyan, and unless one works for a Jewish organization, it's difficult to take off work for Shabbat and holidays.

Mumbai's remaining Jews are descendants of two communities, the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel. The Baghdadi Jews, who at their peak numbered 5,000, came from Iraq about 250 years ago.

The Baghdadis, many of whom were wealthy traders and businessmen, were generally anglicized and comfortable under British rule. After Indian indepen-

dence virtually all of them left for England, Israel or other countries. Less than 200 Baghdadi Jews remain in Mumbai.

About 1,000 Baghdadi Jews live in Israel, according to Ze'ev Schwartzberg, head of the Jewish Agency for Israel's India desk.

Most of Mumbai's community is made up of Bene Israel, Jews who trace their origins to a shipwreck off the Maharashtra coast around 175 B.C.E.

According to legend, the shipwreck left seven Jewish couples from the Galilee living on the Indian coast. Their progeny today speak Marathi and maintain customs peppered with Indian traditions.

"They eat rice and mangos, play cricket and wear saris," Isaac said. "If you live in a village for 2,000 years, you're not going to be eating matzah."

For the past half century, the Bene Israel also have been emigrating in large numbers, motivated by Zionism, a sense of Jewish identity and economic uncertainty in the early years after Indian independence. Immigration to Israel started in 1948, and increased after the Israeli government accepted the Bene Israel as Jews in 1964.

Part of the reason the ORT school was founded in 1961 was to help Jewish men gain skills in draftsmanship, electronics or mechanics that would make them employable in Israel.

There are between 55,000 and 60,000 Bene Israel in Israel today, according to the Jewish Agency.

Today, the largest Bene Israel synagogue in Mumbai, Magen Hassidim, attracts about 60 worshippers on Shabbat, Isaac said. The other synagogues get fewer than 30 worshippers.

According to community leaders, aliyah has slowed over the past decade — particularly in the past two or three years — and Mumbai's Jewish population has remained constant. Kolet said aliyah has declined largely for economic reasons.

"If the community wants to continue, it's viable," Kolet said.

"And the community doesn't want to move."

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

The Bene Israel
maintain customs
peppered with
Indian traditions.

Jews figure in two key congressional races

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Anything could happen in congressional midterm elections this November, and several prominent Jewish candidates are in the mix.

President Bush's sagging approval ratings have raised the possibility that Democrats could take back control of the U.S. House of Representatives. For that to happen, analysts say, two Jewish Democratic candidates likely will have to win traditionally Republican seats.

One challenger, Ron Klein, is taking on a 13-term incumbent in Florida's 22nd district. The other, Gabrielle Giffords, hopes to replace Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.), a key pro-Israel member of the House Appropriations

Committee who announced his retirement earlier this year.

"In 1994, when Republicans swept into the House, they knocked off a huge number of Democratic Jews," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council. "For us to come back, we've got to win Jewish Democratic seats like these."

Indeed, after the 1990 midterm elections, 34 Jews were elected to serve in the House. Two years later, that number had fallen to 29. When the Republicans took over the House after 1994 balloting, just 24 Jews were elected.

Currently, 26 Jews are serving in the House of Representatives, and 11 in the Senate. All but two in each house are Democrats.

Both Klein and Giffords have been reaching out to the Jewish community, in their districts and nationwide.

"These are serious candidates," Forman said.

Matt Brooks, director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said talk of Democrats winning Congress was "premature."

"I am confident Republicans will maintain control of both the House and the Senate," he said.

Republicans currently hold 232 seats in the House, while Democrats have 203, including Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), an independent who caucuses with the Democrats.

The Democrats need 218 seats, which means a change in 15 districts, to become the majority. ■

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

Underdog takes on Florida incumbent



Office of Ron Klein
Ron Klein

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ron Klein has been the underdog before: Running for the Florida state legislature in 1992 — his first run for office — the Boca Raton Democrat relied on friends in the local Jewish federation to help him defeat a 10-year incumbent. Now he's running for Congress, taking on a man who has been in the job for 26 years. But Klein says he's ready for the challenge.

"I think right now people are anxious for a change," said Klein, 47, who has been a state senator since 1996. "But you have to

offer a change that is consistent with their vision."

While most challengers are given little chance, Klein's race against Rep. Clay Shaw in Florida's 22nd district has garnered national attention. A senior member on the U.S. House of Representatives' Ways and Means Committee, Shaw has come close to losing his seat before — and in the current political environment, a strong Democratic challenger like Klein is getting national party support to unseat him.

Klein traveled to Washington earlier this month to raise funds for his congressional campaign. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the Democratic whip in the House, held a fund raiser for him, a strong signal of Klein's political viability.

Officials in Klein's campaign said they hoped the one-day trip would yield \$30,000 in new funds.

The grandson of immigrants who fled the Nazis, Klein counts reforming Florida's Holocaust education program as one of his crowning achievements.

"Growing up in Cleveland, I remember my high school textbook," he said. "It said 6 million Jews were killed, but gave no

context. Florida had the same thing."

Klein worked with director Steven Spielberg in 1994 to show "Schindler's List" to political leaders in Tallahassee, the state capital. When the legislation stalled in committee, Spielberg agreed to call legislators to push for Klein's bill.

It passed on the last day of the state's legislative session, which coincidentally was Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Klein said he has received support from Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), whom Klein replaced in the state senate when Wexler was elected to Washington.

Shaw is being supported by the Republican Jewish Coalition's political action committee.

Klein said he has a commitment to Israel that comes from his "heart and soul," and

hopes that a seat in Congress also will allow him a role in Middle East policy-making.

"I recognize that, in this moment in history, the United States is very supportive of Israel," he said. "But as members of the Jewish community, we understand history very well, and we can never be complacent." ■

Shaw's seat has been cited as the third most vulnerable in Congress this year.

Former Fulbright scholar aims for Arizona seat

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

Gabrielle Giffords thinks there's something about Jewish women that makes them ideal lawmakers.

"Jewish women have this attitude that is much more inclusive and takes everyone in," she said recently. "Often when we need to get a difficult problem solved, Jewish women have been the right ones to turn to."

Giffords watched as two new Jewish women joined the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004, bringing the total in Congress to nine. She wants to be the 10th, hoping to fill the spot left open in Arizona's 8th district by the sudden retirement of Rep. Jim Kolbe (R).

The 35-year-old state senator is in a tight Democratic primary to succeed Kolbe. Her main opponent, former local news anchor Patty Weiss, is better known, but Giffords has been proficient in raising money.

"There's a lot of optimism about her and her abilities to win that seat, it's a natural swing district," said Chuck Todd, editor of National Journal's Hotline, a daily political newsletter.

Giffords was all smiles as she greeted potential donors at a cocktail reception during the American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference in early March. She said in a recent interview that she reconnected with her Judaism in 2001, when she traveled to Israel as a participant on the American Jewish Committee's Project Interchange.

"I just felt this immediate bond," she said. "I realized I really had to work to strengthen my commitment for Judaism and for Israel."

Giffords was born to intermarried parents in Tucson, and said the exposure to multiple religious beliefs and cultures gave her an appreciation for diversity. She said her Jewish grandparents instilled in her the values of tolerance and respect.

She attends a Reform synagogue in Tucson, and said she identifies as Jewish.

In a short political career, Giffords has traveled the world. She met her boyfriend, astronaut Mark Kelly, when they toured China last year as young leadership fellows for the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations. Kelly is expected to pilot the next space shuttle mission later this year.

Giffords was a Fulbright scholar in Mexico in the early 1990s and participated

in fellowships in Germany and Belgium in 2004.

She said the United States missed an important opportunity after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to form partnerships around the world, and said she remains concerned about a lack of American leadership in education and business.

The United States used to be motivated by the Cold War to accelerate technology research and education, she said, citing the Soviet launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957.

"I believe the United States has fallen behind in that innovation system," she said. "We have lost our edge."

Giffords' view on foreign affairs are noteworthy, especially since she is running to replace Kolbe, the current chairman of the foreign operations subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. It's unclear whether Giffords would replace Kolbe on that panel.

Giffords describes herself as a strong supporter of foreign aid, but said she opposes money going to a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

"When it comes to the situation for example in Palestine, I don't believe that we can back a government that talks about the elimination of the Israeli people or even the elimination of the United States," she said. "That's not just in Palestine, but also in Iran."

Giffords highlights her membership in the local ACLU, and said she is concerned about prayer in schools and the public domain.

"Having served in the legislature, I know what it's like to have a daily prayer that is often offensive to not just legislators but constituents," she said.

Democrats view Kolbe's seat as primed for pickup this November. The district voted for Bush in 2004 and Republicans have a 40 percent to 35 percent advantage in party registration, but the current political climate suggests a small potential advantage for Democrats, according to political analysts.

Kolbe was known as a moderate legislator, and the Republicans may nominate



Office of Gabrielle Giffords

Gabrielle Giffords

someone too conservative for the district, Todd said.

Giffords herself first registered as a Republican, but switched parties when she began to run for office.

Giffords has been criticized by Republicans for opposing tough immigration restrictions and border security measures while serving in the state legislature.

Now she's making illegal immigration and border security key aspects of her campaign. But she said she remains concerned about the erosion of civil liberties

under the guise of counter-terrorism.

"The government needs to look out for all people," she said. "I'm fearful when it comes to infringing liberties on people; it's oftentimes a slippery slope."

As a state legislator, Giffords worked to extend the statute of limitations on benefits to the more-than 500 Holocaust survivors living in Arizona.

Her House campaign has won some key endorsements, most recently from former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.).

The Democratic primary is Sept. 12. Giffords said she's confident the Democratic Party can win the seat.

"I believe our country is facing some of the most difficult times we've faced in our history," she said. "It is incumbent on all of us to step up and take action."

Giffords is making illegal immigration and border security key aspects of her campaign.

'Never again,' but it happened in Cambodia

By TIBOR KRAUSZ

BANGKOK (JTA) — As someone who lost practically his entire family to the Holocaust, I came to regard the Nazis' systematic murder of Jews as the ultimate benchmark for mass murder. Any subsequent 20th-century genocides seemed merely sad reminders that the post-Holocaust pledge "Never again" was just an empty promise.

Tuol Sleng is Cambodia's version of Auschwitz. I found visiting the current museum at the site not only a harrowing experience but an eye-opener about the similarities between the two collective tragedies.

Outside Tuol Sleng, or "Poison Tree Hill," ragged little children chase a football while a small girl savors a vanilla ice cream. Like over half of Cambodians, they were born after the Khmer Rouge genocide and probably don't know why this former school has been turned into a museum.

The three-story, horseshoe-shaped building with open-air corridors resembles any high school in Southeast Asia. Once it was anything but. Here, even courtyard trees take on sinister connotations: Perhaps people were spread-eagled to branches and flayed alive.

Like the memorial at Auschwitz, Tuol Sleng can painfully personalize a formerly abstract tragedy.

A former Khmer Rouge prison, the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes was once known as Prison S-21.

In a room left as Vietnamese troops found it in 1979 after driving Pol Pot and his thugs back into the jungles, stains still blacken the walls around a metal bed hooked up to electric prods under a large photograph of a burnt victim, the last to die here after no doubt "confessing" to being an "imperialist stooge" recruited by the CIA to undermine Cambodia's new people's paradise.

While their end results were similar, the Holocaust and Cambodia's Killing Fields were motivated by different ideologies. One was the industrialized, systematic mass murder of a people purely for ethnic reasons with a concomitant attempt to erase an entire, millennia-old religious culture from the face of the earth. The other saw millions of helpless Cambodians clobbered and starved to death fairly randomly by their indoctrinated compatriots who often

came from the same village, by virtue of being "enemies of the revolution."

Yet the Holocaust and the Killing Fields had this much in common: They not just obliterated the lives of the murdered, they irretrievably destroyed civilizations.

The Nazis' mass murder of Jews is singular among modern genocides because beyond exterminating 6 million Jews with industrial efficiency, it destroyed a distinct civilization — that of

Eastern European Jewry.

Cambodia's own holocaust came close. With a back-to-basics agrarian utopia in mind, Pol Pot set about eliminating all traces of culture and urbanity from Khmer society. Monks, teachers, doctors, lawyers and intellectuals — anyone with spectacles qualified — were butchered, in a civilization that produced the renowned Angkor Wat temple complex dating from the Middle Ages. It was no accident that the school of Tuol Sleng was turned into the regime's most notorious slaughterhouse.

Covering the walls in two ground-floor rooms are snapshots. With Gestapo-like efficiency, Khmer Rouge guards took pictures of their victims — men, women, even children, often whole "enemy" families. Most stare back frightened, many dumbstruck, some resigned, a few defiant.

The photos' original purpose was to humiliate. Yet with their help the victims, individually and collectively, have defied their murderers: Though they went to their deaths nameless, they haven't remained faceless.

Past classrooms were turned into torture chambers.

A gruesome gallery of oil paintings provides an eyewitness account of how inmates met their ends. Left behind by Vann Nath, one of seven survivors out of some 16,000 prisoners, the paintings' childish perspectives make them all the more poignant.

Vann Nath has done for the Killing Fields what Art Spiegelman, in his comic book "Maus: A Survivor's Tale," has done for the Holocaust: show horror through the eyes of an innocent. In one painting, guards in the Khmer Rouge's trademark black pajamas and checkered scarves

wrench the fingernails of their captive with pliers; in another, they beat a man to death with bamboo sticks; in a third, they dip a prisoner headfirst into an oil drum of acid.

Between 1975 and 1979 — or Year Zero to Year Four in their reckoning — Pol Pot, or Brother No. 1, and his illiterate peasant boys transformed Cambodia into a country-wide death chamber.

Khmer Rouge executioners killed some 1.7 million Cambodians, or nearly a quarter of the population. It was a national disaster that approached the Holocaust in its quantitative magnitude.

Though Pol Pot died in 1998, his bloody handprints continue to bedevil Cambodia, in its enduring poverty and lawlessness.

Outside the museum, maimed beggars plead for loose change. While several Khmer Rouge stalwarts laze about in retirement in baronial mansions, landmines littering the countryside continue to claim victims daily from among the downtrodden.

Yet life goes on. A comparatively upscale

neighborhood encroaches on the museum's barbed-wire perimeters. A guesthouse has sprouted opposite the museum's gate.

The Cambodian government occasionally pledges to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to trial, but it seems doubtful that the aggressors will be brought to justice.

Nonetheless, survivors and relatives can exact their own measure of justice through remembrance of the victims and appropriate public testimonials. Perhaps that's why Cambodian scholars and nonprofits have turned to Yad Vashem and Holocaust museums in the United States for inspiration in creating their own memorials. Sadly, the Cambodian memorial project remains perennially bedeviled by severe cash restraints.

That said, in one of the world's poorest countries, any funds collected for a fitting museum could be much better spent on improving the lives of Cambodians. The Khmer Rouge, like the Nazis before them, may have killed the past and blighted the present for millions of innocents, but Cambodian survivors, like Jews now prospering again, must be allowed to reclaim the future.

FIRST
PERSON

Tuol Sleng is
Cambodia's
version of
Auschwitz.

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS

■ Elie Wiesel and Judy Yudof, former president of the Conservative Judaism movement, are among nine people named to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. Others named by President Bush to serve until January 2011 include Debra Abrams, of Florida; Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, of New York; Norma Lerner, of Ohio; Marvin Pomerantz, of Iowa; Alan Neil Rechtshaffen, of New York; J. Philip Rosen, of New York; and Bradley David Wine, of Maryland.

■ Sarah Stern announced her departure from the American Jewish Congress, where she was director of the Office of Legislative Governmental Affairs.

■ The United Jewish Communities has nominated Joseph Kanfer as chairman of its board; Kathy Manning as chairwoman of its executive committee; and Michael Gelman as chairman of its consulting committee. UJC also appointed Wendy Block as its national network chair.

■ David Harris was named executive director of the Israel on Campus Coalition. Harris is currently executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

■ Ricky Schechtel was elected chairwoman of the Jewish Funders Network board of directors.

HONORS

■ The National Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and Museum inducted basketball coach Herb Brown; judoist Bob Berland; basketball player Neal Walk; Olympic slalom skier Carrie Sheinberg; basketball player and WNBA President Donna Orender; tennis player Ilana Kloss; sportswriter Roger Kahn; football player John Frank; and soccer player Jeff Agoos.

■ The Anti-Defamation League honored Sir Nicholas Winton for his work in rescuing Czech Jewish children during the Holocaust.

■ Somali-born Dutch lawmaker Ayaan Hirsi Ali was awarded a Moral Courage Award by the American Jewish Committee.

■ Rita Chaikin, coordinator of Isha L'Isha, was honored at the annual Leadership Awards of Vital Voices Global Partnership for her anti-trafficking work.

■ The National Council of Jewish Women was recognized for marketing and communication by the 2006 Communicator Awards.

■ The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding presented the Joseph Papp Racial Harmony Award to Aviv Nevo, president of NV Investments and Kimora Lee Simmons, president and chief creative director of Baby Phat.

Medallions tell Israel's story

By BRETT KLINE

KIBBUTZ TZE'ELIM, Israel (JTA) — Located not far from the Gaza Strip, Kibbutz Tze'elim has 6,000 acres of prime, irrigated desert farmland, one-fifth of which produces sweet potatoes.

In the midst of all those sweet potatoes is a treasure hidden in an underground bomb shelter built in 1947: hundreds of medallions etched in copper and bronze that tell the story of the founding of modern Israel.

There are round etchings of Zionist founding father Theodore Herzl with his trademark beard. There are medallions of writer Sholem Aleichem cast from clay for the Zionist Congress of 1921, and of Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel.

"You can stare at the faces of Herzl and Weizmann and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and they step right out of the copper and bronze into real life," says kibbutz member Boaz Kretschmer, the medallions' owner.

Kretschmer rescued the medallions, produced by his grandfather, from an industrial garbage bin. He hopes one day to be able to show them to the public in a museum he wants to build on the kibbutz.

Kretschmer's grandfather Shmuel arrived in 1905 from Vienna and opened a small engraving factory in Jerusalem. He was a student and then a professor at the famed Bezalel Art School.

The earliest pieces in the collection are landscapes and biblical scenes, created before 1921. After that year, Kretschmer began his service to the official bodies such as the Zionist congresses, the Jewish National Fund, the Knesset, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israel Defense Forces, commemorating the faces and events that helped forge the country.

There is David Ben-Gurion declaring the State of Israel's establishment in Tel Aviv. The 1948 scene was etched in clay, then cast in bronze and copper. All three round tablets are on display.

Insignia for the army — the tank bri-

gade, the Golani infantry brigade and the Givati unit — were worn by soldiers on their uniforms. Next to them is a letter of thanks Ben-Gurion wrote to Shmuel Kretschmer.

Then there is the cast-iron mold of a belt buckle, made for King Abdullah of Jordan in 1930.

"Grandfather died in the 1970s, but I remember him sitting at his desk doing the original etchings," says Boaz Kretschmer, 54, a father of two and grandfather of two.

In 2003, his father, 82, retired and closed the factory. Kretschmer had already made a life for himself on the kibbutz with the sweet potatoes, but his father died before he could join him there.

"The workers were emptying the factory, moving a lot of heavy objects," he says. "I asked my father about them and he said, 'Forget it, this is just old stuff.'"

Kretschmer began taking boxes out of the garbage at the factory and going through them. He was amazed, and took everything that was left.

Kretschmer wants to build a museum on the

kibbutz to attract people to this part of the western Negev Desert.

The kibbutz is ready to provide the building and do the necessary renovation to open the museum. Officials from the Jewish National Fund in Israel, the Jewish Agency, Israel's Tourism Ministry and various political parties have all visited the kibbutz to see the medallions.

"Everyone recognizes the historical and cultural value of this, but so far no one has money to give," Kretschmer says. "The names in our visitors book are impressive, but the money has not followed."

He estimates that with the building taken care of by the kibbutz, another \$700,000 is needed to get the museum up and running. The JNF is looking for donors to put together funding, he says.

Meanwhile, people come from the region alone or in small groups to see the medals, coins, insignia and etchings.

Some inquire about the sweet potatoes, and are given a few large, chunky dark orange souvenirs to take.

ARTS
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CULTURE

'Everyone recognizes the historical and cultural value of this, but so far no one has money to give.'

Boaz Kretschmer
Kibbutz member

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas sees peace plebiscite

Mahmoud Abbas said he would put any Israeli-Palestinian peace deal to a referendum, circumventing the Hamas government.

The Palestinian Authority president, who has been struggling to restart peacemaking since the Islamic terrorist group took power in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, pitched the plebiscite idea in a Thursday interview with Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv.

"It is my intention to bring the results of negotiations, if and when they are completed, to the Palestinian people in the form of a referendum," Abbas said. "The Palestinian people will decide."

Knesset gets woman speaker

Dalia Itzik was sworn in as the first female Knesset speaker. A former Cabinet minister and Labor Party veteran, Kadima member Itzik was sworn in Thursday as Israel's Parliament convened to approve Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's new government.

"My mission is to represent all sectors of the Knesset and society," Itzik said.

Lieberman blasts Arab lawmakers

A right-wing Israeli lawmaker hinted that Arab colleagues who hold contacts with enemy groups should be executed. In a Knesset speech Thursday, Avigdor Lieberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, invoked the capital punishment handed down to Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg.

"I hope this will be the fate of the collaborators in this house," he said, a reference to Israeli Arab lawmakers who have met with members of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority or leaders of Hezbollah.

The Israeli Arab factions reacted with outrage. One lawmaker called Lieberman a "neo-Nazi," while another lodged a complaint with the Knesset Ethics Committee. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert came to the Arab lawmakers' defense.

Court orders Hebron eviction

Israel's High Court ordered out settlers who had taken residence in a West Bank home claimed by Palestinians. A three-justice panel on Thursday served an eviction notice to settlers who took over the three-story house near the Avraham Avinu neighborhood in Hebron last month, claiming it had been purchased from its Palestinian owners.

Palestinians accuse the settlers of squatting. The settlers have until Friday morning to leave or face eviction. The High Court said the property should be boarded up while a lower court decides who owns it.

Olmert backs JAFI's Bielski

Ehud Olmert officially called on the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization to continue in his post.

Zeev Bielski was elected last year and will be up for re-election at the WZO Congress at the end of June. It's not clear who might run against Bielski, a former mayor of Ra'anana. Bielski's original candidacy was endorsed by Ariel Sharon, Olmert's predecessor as prime minister. Olmert affirmed his support for Bielski in a letter Thursday.

NORTH AMERICA

Republicans pass chaplain prayer vote

Republicans approved an amendment to a military bill that would allow chaplains to pray "according to their own conscience,"

but rejected a change calling for "sensitivity" to other faiths. "Each chaplain shall have the prerogative to pray according to the dictates of the chaplain's own conscience, except as must be limited by military necessity, with any such limitation being imposed in the least restrictive manner feasible," said the amendment passed Wednesday night by the U.S. House of Representatives' Armed Services Committee.

The amendment addresses evangelical Christian anger at the military for preventing pastors from including references to Jesus in communal prayers or in ministrations to non-Christians. Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) attempted to modify the amendment by adding a clause calling for chaplains to "demonstrate sensitivity, respect and tolerance for all faiths present on each occasion at which prayers are offered."

His proposal failed, with all but one Republican, Candice Miller of Michigan, voting against. Israel, who is Jewish, told JTA that the vote "undermines the values of pluralism." The amended bill now goes to the full House.

Chabad rabbi delivers national prayer

A Chabad rabbi delivered one of several prayers at the White House on the National Day of Prayer.

"We as a nation are assured and comforted by knowing of the president's unwavering faith in that which we all know is God's truth; that goodness, kindness and freedom will prevail, against any and all odds," Rabbi Sholom Ciment of Palm Beach County, Fla., said Thursday before reciting the blessing for the U.S. president composed by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the first to live in the United States.

Other clerics also delivered prayers. Jewish officials present said they noted a conscious effort by the White House to make the service inclusive.

Jewish medical school wins state approval

New Jersey approved plans for Touro College to open a Jewish medical school. The privately funded, \$50 million project now needs the approval of the American Medical Association's Liaison Committee on Medical Education.

If okayed, the Touro University College of Medicine will be the second Jewish-sponsored medical school in the country, the college said in a release. Touro College, which has its roots in New York's Orthodox Jewish community, also is seeking to open a medical school in New York City's Harlem neighborhood.

The school currently operates campuses in three U.S. states — New York, California and Florida — and eight countries.

WORLD

Report: No systematic bias in BBC coverage

There is no evidence of systematic bias in the BBC's coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but the British station shouldn't shy away from using the word "terrorism," a panel found.

The report, issued by a five-person panel appointed last year by the BBC, did note individual cases of biased coverage. The Guardian reported, but said that overall the BBC made an effort to report impartially.

Still, the report concluded that the BBC "does not consistently give a full and fair account of the conflict," and in some cases favors the Israeli side over the Palestinians, the London-based Times reported.

Israeli deaths, for example, received greater coverage than Palestinian deaths, the report said, and Israelis got more air time than Palestinians on news and current affairs programs. That might surprise Jewish groups, who have accused the BBC of being heavily skewed in favor of the Palestinians.