

IN THE NEWS
Second Hamas minister delivers money

A second Hamas minister returned to the Gaza Strip with money en route to the Palestinian Authority government. Information Minister Yousef Rizka entered Gaza with \$2 million in cash and delivered it to the P.A. Finance Ministry, Ha'aretz reported. On Wednesday, the Palestinian Authority's foreign minister, Mahmoud Zahar, returned to Gaza with a reported \$20 million. After Western countries halted aid to the Hamas-led government, the Palestinian Authority has been unable to meet its financial obligations.

Gaza rockets wound three

Islamic Jihad members fired a round of Kassam rockets into Israel, lightly injuring three people in the town of Sderot. One person was lightly injured in the face by shrapnel Thursday after a rocket fell on a factory, collapsing its roof. Also Thursday, Hamas released an official statement denying a report in Ha'aretz that they were halting rocket attacks.

Congress bans P.A. use of emergency moneys

Both houses of the U.S. Congress passed an emergency supplemental funding bill that included language forbidding spending to the Palestinian Authority.

The \$94.5 billion bill, which will provide assistance to Gulf Coast hurricane victims and fund the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, passed the U.S. Senate on Thursday, and the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this week.

It requires the secretary of state to certify that the Palestinian Authority has "demonstrated its commitment to the principles of nonviolence, the recognition of Israel, and the acceptance of previous agreements and obligations," before it receives any of the funds. The bill is now awaiting President Bush's signature.

WORLD REPORT

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Ron Sachs

Mikey Weinstein, who is suing the U.S. Air Force.

Jewish father tackles proselytizing in the Air Force after sons' harassment

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Betrayal. Contagion. Oceans of blood. That's Mikey Weinstein, describing the threat he believes the United States faces from the Christian evangelists he says are permeating the military. At least, that's the printable Weinstein.

And he says to expect more of the same in-your-face approach as his Military Religious Freedom Foundation picks up steam and continues to pursue lawsuits against the U.S. military.

"We're out of the business of comforting the afflicted, and we've gone into the business of afflicting the comfortable," Weinstein said in Washington last week hours before a fund-raiser at a posh Arlington, Va., address for the foundation he established a year ago.

Weinstein, an Air Force veteran and an assistant counsel in the Reagan administration, was thrust into this limelight 18 months ago

when both his sons reported anti-Jewish harassment during their stints at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Weinstein, 51, was shocked; he had never experienced such intense hostility, including obscenities and epithets; nor had his father, a U.S. Navy veteran. The culprit, he concluded, was a new pervasive evangelism in the military. Evangelical fliers were distributed on campus, chaplains proselytized from their lecterns and cadets who did not attend prayer meetings were snubbed — or worse.

The revelations were like a bolt, Weinstein said, precisely because as a veteran of the military's legal corps, he understood that the armed forces

work under a hierarchy.

"We don't let sergeants pitch Amway because we know of the draconian structure of the military hierarchy," he said.

He felt the need to stand up to an "unconstitutional contagion," he told JTA. "We have seen this train leave the station before, and

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ *Weinstein never experienced such intense hostility during his own Air Force stint*

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we've ended up with oceans of blood."

Since then, Weinstein has joined Melinda Morton, a Lutheran chaplain fired by the Air Force for her critiques of evangelism, in becoming the go-to address for media seeking commentary on the issue.

It has also brought less welcome attention.

Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), the chairman of the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, told the Washington Times last month that it would be "folly" to instruct chaplains to "start editing prayers."

Weinstein says with a half-smile: "I've been called the field general of the armies of Satan."

He gives as good as he gets.

Weinstein, who lives in Albuquerque, where he is an executive employed by billionaire businessman Ross Perot, recently turned on his congresswoman, Rep. Heather Wilson.

Wilson, a fellow Air Force veteran, had employed Weinstein's son, Casey, and had walked him across the stage when he graduated in 2004. She was also one of only eight Republicans who backed a bill aimed at rolling back evangelical coercion in the military.

That wasn't good enough for Weinstein, who is now fund-raising for Wilson's Democratic opponent, New Mexico Attorney General Patricia Madrid, in what is expected to be a tight race. He says Wilson has not been sufficiently outspoken on the issue.

"Heather Wilson took me and my family,

and threw us under a bus to bleed by the side of the road," Weinstein recently told the Albuquerque Tribune. He called her silence "betrayal."

That kind of rhetoric unsettles Jewish groups, who count Wilson as a friend. Weinstein, currently on a fund-raising tour of major American cities, said he opposed the conciliatory approach he says is employed by Jewish groups and church-state separation advocates.

"They've become staid," he said.

The centerpiece of the foundation's activity has been Weinstein's suit, filed in October against the U.S. Air Force.

The lawsuit would force the Air Force to ensure that "no member of the U.S. Air Force, including a chaplain, is permitted to evangelize, proselytize, or in any related way attempt to involuntarily convert, pressure, exhort or persuade a fellow member of the U.S. Air Force to accept their own religious beliefs while on duty."

The Air Force, backed by conservative Christian groups and by powerful congressional Republicans, says such requirements would infringe on army officer's free speech rights.

The Christian Coalition has been front and center in the campaign, saying that keeping chaplains from mentioning Jesus in multifield contexts constitutes "religious discrimination against Christians."

That argument infuriates Weinstein, who calls it "torturing language." He says the military should never have become a forum for this debate. "The bombs and the bullets all belong to the military," he said. "If you lose the military, you lose everything."

It's a stark contrast to how major Jewish organizations have dealt with the issue.

In a statement Thursday, four advocacy groups granted a cautious welcome to Air Force guidelines aimed at stemming proselytizing.

The guidelines have "substantially alleviated concerns that followed reports of religious proselytization and anti-Semitism," said the letter signed by the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and the Reform movement's

Religious Action Center.

The Jewish groups suggested a greater emphasis against "particularistic" prayer in multifield settings and urged officers not to discuss beliefs with enlisted people in the military.

The one-page guidelines issued by the Air Force back away from such specific recommendations, instead generally recommending "sensitivity." An earlier version, which urged officers to keep their counsel in front of enlisted men, was rescinded by the Air Force after a nationwide campaign by conservative Christian groups. Weinstein dismisses the guidelines as "words,"

and says the Air Force's rollback proves his point.

Some Jewish groups said engagement is better than Weinstein's brand of confrontation.

"The key issue for us is that we want to be engaged in the constructive

fashion and to recognize that there were some changes we weren't thrilled with," said Richard Foltin, the general counsel for the AJCommittee. Others said Weinstein provided a useful "bad cop" role in the effort to engage the military.

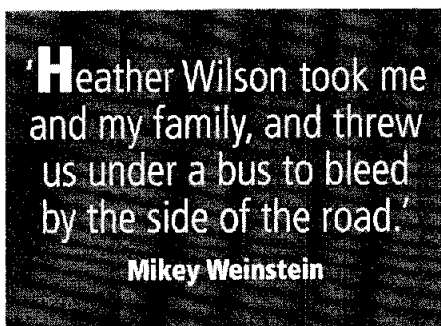
"He's certainly brought the issue very dramatically to the fore and for that we are all grateful," said Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director. "We're giving the Air Force some slack, but there's nothing wrong with suing — maybe it helps."

Weinstein's friends say not to count him out.

"He's tenacious if he's anything," said Sam Bregman, his attorney. A colleague from his Reagan administration days, Sam Fairchild, said Weinstein will always find a new way around a problem.

"He was creative in solutions, able to look beyond bureaucratic perspective," said Fairchild, adding that Weinstein came up with the idea of auctioning lab space on space shuttles to help pay for the missions. Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), who has taken the lead in the U.S. House of Representatives against attempts to broaden allowances for evangelizing, says Weinstein has been key in the fight.

"Mikey Weinstein has pursued this more aggressively than anyone I know," Israel said.



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Olmert buoyed by European support

By DAN BARON

PARIS (JTA) — Israel may be far from peace with the Palestinians or Iran, but after Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's visits to Britain and France this week, the Jewish state feels much closer to Europe.

It began with what was not said.

Neither British Prime Minister Tony Blair nor French President Jacques Chirac condemned Israel's possible unilateral withdrawals in the West Bank.

While both urged Olmert to exhaust efforts to negotiate with the Palestinians, there was tacit acknowledgment that it may well be pointless given the radicalism of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

"You can't have a two-state solution with a group that doesn't recognize your right to exist," Blair told reporters after a kosher, catered lunch Monday with Olmert at 10 Downing Street.

"This thing either moves forward by agreement, or other ways have to be found," he said.

Chirac, who hosted Olmert in Paris on Wednesday, was quoted as telling him that Western demands for Hamas to moderate its stand toward Israel as a precondition for diplomacy were "totally non-negotiable."

The absence of a veto against Olmert's vision of removing dozens of West Bank settlements and annexing others behind a new Israeli border was a dramatic departure from long-standing European Union policy of rejecting unilateralism outright. It followed on the heels of President Bush's praise last month for Olmert's plan as "bold."

Emboldened by the reaction, Olmert declared, "The realignment plan is unstoppable." In Europe, "acknowledgment of this inevitability has been enhanced," he added.

But he refused to give a deadline for its implementation, saying he would prefer to carry out the withdrawal in the framework of negotiations with P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas — a relative moderate — on condition that Abbas first fulfill his obligation under existing peace plans to crack down on Hamas.

Given intensifying fighting in the West Bank and Gaza Strip between members of Abbas' Fatah faction and Hamas, Olmert announced in the British



GPO/BP Images/JTA

French President Jacques Chirac, right, shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Parliament that he had authorized the transfer of Jordanian-supplied weapons to Abbas' security forces, "to bolster him against Hamas."

There also was Israeli-European consensus on the need to curb Iran's nuclear program.

At a banquet for Olmert in France's National Assembly, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin recounted his country's role in trying to talk down Tehran.

"We entirely share Israel's concerns over Iran, given its president's calls for Israel's destruction and Holocaust denials," he said.

The Holocaust connection did not end there. In Paris, Olmert attended the dedication of a memorial to French gentiles who tried to prevent the Nazi deportation and massacre of Jews. That, in turn, prompted reflection on a recent spate of anti-Semitic incidents in France, mainly emanating from disaffected Muslim immigrants motivated by pro-Palestinian sympathies.

The phenomenon prompted Olmert's predecessor, Ariel Sharon, to urge French Jews two years ago to flee their country for Israel.

That strained Israeli-Franco ties,

and Sharon's efforts at rapprochement — including the creation of an Israel-France Friendship Fund — were cut short by his stroke in January.

In the interim, the French have been busy.

De Villepin described a campaign of prevention, law enforcement and education that he and Chirac ordered which he said has cut anti-Semitic incidents by 50 percent in the past two years — despite the recent religiously motivated murder of Ilan Halimi, a young French Jew, and a rampage by black vigilantes in a Jewish

district of Paris.

"We will pursue this struggle, not just in France proper but in Europe and the entire world," De Villepin pledged.

Olmert was impressed. He called Chirac "one of the greatest fighters against anti-Semitism in the world" and marveled at the "new spirit of understanding" he felt in Europe toward Israel.

But encouraging aliyah remains a Zionist precept incumbent upon every Israeli chief executive. Olmert was quoted as telling Chirac that he still wanted French Jews to immigrate to Israel.

"The problem is, not enough French Jews are doing so," Olmert quipped. ■

'The realignment plan is unstoppable.'
Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

Young Jewish authors joust jovially

By DINA KRAFT

KIRYAT ONO, Israel (JTA) — In their first meeting, Nathan Englander and Etgar Keret playfully joust about influences and literature and how experiencing Jewish and Israeli life informs their writing.

Englander, 36, a former Long Island yeshiva boy turned darling of the American literature scene and his Israeli counterpart, Keret, 38, in turns adored and excoriated for his fantastical and rebellious short stories, came together recently at a conference sponsored by Bar-Ilan University's master's program in creative writing.

Their rapport was instant and full of good humor. When audience members at a public discussion between them requested that they speak up, Englander offered, "I'll project from the diaphragm." Keret quipped, "and I'll try to speak from Nathan's diaphragm."

Englander's 1999 debut collection of short stories, "For the Relief of Unbearable Urges," became an international best seller with its tales of the secret desires of Orthodox wig makers, condemned Yiddish writers awaiting death in a Stalinist prison and Jews on a train to a concentration camp who transform into acrobats and tumble their way to safety. His upcoming novel, "The Ministry of Special Cases," eight years in the making, is about the Jewish community in Buenos Aires on the eve of Argentina's 1976 military coup.

Englander eventually rejected his Orthodox upbringing and immigrated to Israel, where he wrote his first book in a Jerusalem cafe. He sees the book as part of his transition out of the Orthodox world.

"It was clear it was about my leaving the religious community," he said. His upcoming novel, he said, is about "the idea of community as a whole, how it functions and how it corrupts."

Unlike Englander's rich, literary prose, Keret's stories have a casual, zany tone. Modern Israel is his usual backdrop, populated with slackers, soldiers and factory workers. His work has been praised for tapping into the Zeitgeist of Israeli youth with witty, but often less than pretty portraits of alienation and fear.

Keret's most recent collection, "The Nimrod Flip-Out," published last month in the United States, was written during



Jonathan Beck

American Jewish author Nathan Englander, left, and Israeli author Etgar Keret.

the second intifada and was influenced, he said, by the daily toll of violence.

In one story, a pathologist examines the body of a woman killed in a suicide bombing only to discover tumors had taken over most of her body and that she would have died within weeks. The pathologist cannot decide whether or not to tell the woman's bereaved husband.

Breaking ranks with Israel's old guard of writers who try to infuse their work with ideological themes, Keret's cheeky stories seem to mock the country's literary conventions. Keret was born in Israel but feels himself an outsider. Englander, at odds with his Orthodox upbringing in America, for a time chose Israel as his home.

It was in Israel that he met a group of young Argentine immigrants whose stories would help inspire the idea for his novel. It was also in Israel that he began to feel how politics imprints itself onto life.

"Living in Israel made me understand when politics is in your front yard," he said. Keret, although often hailed as the voice of young Israelis, feels himself more a Diaspora Jew than a native son.

"I feel very connected to the Diaspora," he told JTA. "My stories seem to me to have

more in common with Kafka and Isaac Bashevis Singer than A.B. Yehoshua." He added: "I was born here but I am the son of immigrants and I feel part of this but also feel on the outside. I think that is something very Jewish but something Israelis have lost."

As the son of Holocaust survivors, Keret finds a sense of eerie triumph that his books sell best abroad in Germany and Poland.

His mother, who grew up in Poland and was the only member of her immediate family to survive the war, was especially

moved after she read his work translated into Polish. She told him he wrote like a Polish exile.

When she visited him in Germany where he was a visiting instructor at a Berlin university a few years ago, she told him a sto-

ry that had haunted her. During her father's last days alive in the Warsaw Ghetto, he told her she would survive and one day avenge the family.

"They want to erase our name. But you will stay alive and everyone will know our name," he said.

She told Keret she had lived to see her father's vision — the sight of German bookshops filled with his books and the lines of people waiting to hear him speak. ■

ARTS & CULTURE

In one story, a pathologist examines a woman killed in a suicide bombing only to discover tumors had taken over most of her body and that she would have died within weeks.

'Shock-and-awe' Jewish literature

By DINA KRAFT

KIRYAT ONO, Israel (JTA) — David Bezmozgis, the young writer described recently as a “one-man shock-and-awe invasion of North American literature” sits on a plaza on the edge of Bar-Ilan University’s leafy campus and in his calm, steady voice talks about identity.

“I feel the opposite of wherever I am,” says the author. In Canada, where he immigrated with his family from Latvia in 1980, he often feels like an outsider. When he returned to Latvia for a visit recently he “felt more like a stranger than anywhere else.”

Bezmozgis writes about the Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union he grew up among in Toronto.

“I felt something was happening with the last wave of Soviet Jewish immigration,” he said, explaining it had been his ambition since he was a teenager to write about the community.

After a brief stint as a filmmaker, his literary star has risen quickly.

His publications have included *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, *Zoetrope* and *The New York Times Magazine* and his collection of short stories, “*Natasha and Other Stories*” has been translated into 12 languages. In 2005, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship.

He was in Israel late last month as one of the featured writers lecturing and reading from his work at a conference at Bar-Ilan University’s master’s program in creative writing.

Bezmozgis spoke there of the alienation felt by the Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, including his own family, when they arrived in Canada. He described how they struggled to stay afloat financially and to find their way in a very foreign culture.

He said that what the community went through in Toronto, including an initially awkward relationship with the city’s established Jewish community, was not unlike the experience of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants elsewhere in North America.

“There was a very active Jewish community who really fought for these Soviet Jews, to get them out,” he said. “They had certain expectations of how

the Soviet Jews would be when they arrived” and “the Soviet Jews had certain expectations.

“These expectations did not entirely mesh; if there is anything we can rely on, it is that people misunderstand each other.”

In his book, he tracks the adjustment of the fictional Berman family to a new life in Canada. Bezmozgis says the stories’ environment is drawn from expe-

rience, but that the work is fiction, not autobiography.

In the short story “*Topka*” that he read to the conference, he tells the tale of the family’s son Mark, whose recent arrival in Toronto is softened

by his relationship with a small dog who becomes in turns his greatest joy and then his tragedy. The story conveys the overwhelming loneliness that can creep into immigrant life.

The book has found acclaim among readers and critics.

“The collection’s strength lies in how Bezmozgis layers the specifics of Rus-

sian-Jewish experience with universal childhood and adolescent dilemmas,” said a review from *Publisher’s Weekly*, adding, “These complex, evocative stories herald the arrival of a significant new voice.”

Influenced by the works of Philip Roth and Mordecai Richler, Bezmozgis turned to writing after beginning a career making films.

He said that as the son of immigrants who had come to North America both for freedom and for a better financial future, he at first decided not to pursue writing as a full-time career.

He studied filmmaking at UCLA and his first documentary, “*L.A. Mohel*,” about three ritual circumcisers in Los

Angeles, was screened at film festivals around the world.

To pursue a career that was not well-paid “when there is all this plenty around was difficult for my parents to comprehend,” he said. “I tried to find a middle ground.”

Pausing, he added, “All along, all I wanted to do is write.” ■

ARTS
&
CULTURE

His short story
‘Topka’ conveys the
overwhelming loneliness
that can creep into
immigrant life.



Dina Kraft

Canadian Jewish writer David Bezmozgis reads from his book ‘*Natasha and Other Stories*’ at a Bar-Ilan University conference, May 23, in Ramat Gan, Israel.

Developing the Negev for resettlement

By DAVID J. SILVERMAN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Kfar Adiel, a village lush with fruit trees, lawns and neatly manicured gardens that arose in three years from the Negev's ancient desert sands, may help solve a 21st century dilemma: where to resettle tens of thousands of Jews.

Israeli officials and pro-Israel lobbyists in Washington believe the 40-home village built by the Ayalim Association, an organization of university students, could point to an answer for up to 70,000 settlers to be evacuated from the West Bank, as well as the 8,000 settlers still awaiting resettlement from last year's Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Efrat Duvdevani, director of Israel's Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee, said Ayalim development projects could soften the blow for evacuees by presenting them with thriving communities instead of the poverty now dogging the Galilee and Negev regions.

"Ayalim's founders, participants and supporters are building young, dynamic, socially involved communities that constitute an anchor for helping develop the full potential of the region," she told JTA.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's plan to redraw Israel's borders by as early as 2008 has become the centerpiece of the U.S.-Israel dialogue. The question skirting the grand plan is what to do with the evacuees.

A future for the settlers drove a session at the recent policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. The lobbying powerhouse is working behind the scenes to raise U.S. money to help Israel absorb the massive resettlement. Ayalim and its Kfar Adiel success were showcased at the session.

"Basically, 75 percent of Israel's population on 25 percent of the land; that makes no sense in a country where land is so precious and so valuable," Ester Kurz, AIPAC's director for legislative strategy and policy, said at the group's policy conference in March.

Israel last summer requested a reported \$2.2 billion from the United States in post-Gaza pullout aid to be invested in the Negev and Galilee. President Bush and other lawmakers initially warmed to the idea, but Israel scrapped the request after Hurricane Katrina exacerbated an already bleak U.S. deficit situation.

A diplomatic source inside the Israeli government told JTA that the request remains "put to the side due to special sensitivities."

Olmert told reporters he raised the issue in only the most general terms when he met with Bush last month, but it is clearly uppermost in his mind: He made Shimon Peres, deputy prime minister, responsible for developing the regions.

U.S. Jewish officials say Israel is planning to eventually up the request by another \$10 billion to accommodate the West Bank withdrawal.

Given the government's renewed attention to the region, Ayalim's young pioneers are seizing the opportunity to fulfill an age-old Zionist dream. Israel's government, Ayalim's largest donor, last year agreed to match any donation the organization receives, whether from individuals or Jewish organizations in Israel or the United States.

Without relying on professional companies or outside workers, Ayalim's students are completing Kfar Adiel — where about 70 of them live year-round — about 22 miles south of Beersheba.

Comprising 60 percent of Israel's overall landmass, the Negev is home to just 9 percent of the population. The bulk of the country's population and resources are concentrated on a narrow strip along the Mediterranean coast.

Four years ago, Dany Glicksberg, 27, and four other young army veterans established the Ayalim, a non-profit. They enlisted students to revive the zeal of their forebears in developing the Negev Desert of southern Israel and the Galilee in the north.

Building Kfar Adiel involves a grueling 10-week stretch during summer break, with students logging 16-hour days in the desert heat.

"We simply took what we heard from our grandparents, and tried to revive that," Glicksberg said. "Ayalim is a formula that guarantees our most basic values: Zionism, pioneering, settling the land and caring for one another."

The development is not limited to building homes. In return for college scholarships and subsidized housing, participants contribute 10 hours of weekly community service during the school year to improve quality of life in the region. Students perform renovation projects and build gardens in surrounding Negev communities, and assist in caring for the elderly.

But the students' greatest contribution is the service they provide to thousands of area children, according to Shmuel Rifman, head of the Ramat Hanegev Regional Council, which governs Kfar Adiel's locality. Ayalim leads educational programs and coordinates extracurricular activities for the children, many of whom are deemed at high risk to engage in crime and substance abuse.

Ayalim recently broke ground on a new village near the Negev town of Dimona, beginning work over the Passover holiday that will be continued this summer. Two additional villages — one in the Negev and another in the Upper Galilee — are slated to begin this summer.

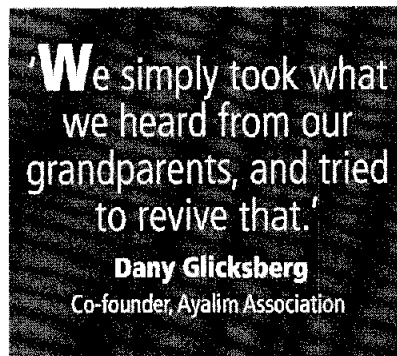
With limited resources, today the organization comprises only 260 students, culled from a total of 5,000 applicants, said Glicksberg.

"You can imagine what we could do with 5,000 students actually taking an active role in the project," he told Israel supporters at a Washington conference in March. With the appropriate funds, Glicksberg hopes to have built five student villages in the Negev and five more in the Galilee within three years.

Shaul Amir, director of the Israel Center at the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado, encountered a fledgling Ayalim outfit three years ago while passing through the area. He said that although there were only about 10 of them, "they were idealistic, motivated and incredible guys."

The Colorado federation has been one of Ayalim's main donors ever since.

If he were 35 years younger, Amir said, he would have been there with them. "You want to join them, you want to be one of them. They represent the pure words of Zionism and pioneerism."



Arts & Culture

Films on Pearl run the gamut

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Film-makers are wrestling with four different projects to document or dramatize the story of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter beheaded by Islamic extremists in Pakistan in early 2002, leaving behind a pregnant wife.

Pearl's life would seem natural for the Hollywood treatment, but the delays and uncertainties of most of the projects are raising concerns about when they will be finished.

One project is a 90-minute documentary called "The Journalist and the Jihadi: The Murder of Daniel Pearl," narrated by CNN correspondent Christine Amanpour. It will be broadcast by HBO in October.

A fair amount of publicity has surrounded the feature film "A Mighty Heart," in part because it's based on a book by Daniel Pearl's widow, Mariane Pearl.

"Who Killed Daniel Pearl?" is inspired by the book of the same title by Bernard-Henri Levy, in which the French writer described his yearlong investigation into the reporter's death.

Producer Charlie Lyons e-mailed that he hopes to start filming the Pearl story for Beacon Pictures in the fall.

The script will differ from the book to avoid infringement on the "Mighty Heart" movie. As Lyons wrote, "Some elements of the story will allow for literary inspiration."

For one, the movie will be mainly a political thriller in which author Levy will be transformed into an American celebrity television reporter.

Finally, there are one or two references on the Internet to a film project billed as "Infinite Justice," which deals with an American reporter named Arnold Silverman, "who is held hostage by Muslim fundamentalists in Karachi," according to reports.

Judea and Ruth Pearl have mixed feelings about the rash of film projects.

Ruth Pearl said, "They are probably doing their best, but how can they express the emotions of a mother for her son?" ■

This Israeli guy's got game

By YULIANNA VILKOS

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Israeli basketball player Afik Nissim doesn't like to play on Saturday for his Kiev team, but he recently had to do so for a big game.

"I try not to violate Shabbat, but basketball is the only thing I can make an exception for," says the 25-year-old, who was raised in a suburb of Tel Aviv. "If I have to travel with the team or play on Saturday, I do: It's my job, and I love it," says Nissim, who has played basketball since he was 6 years old.

Unfortunately, Nissim's team, BC Kiev, lost in the finals to Azovmash. But Nissim, who has averaged just less than 10 points a game this year, has still established himself as one of the key players on one of Ukraine's top teams.

Nissim, who plays guard and is known for his outside shooting, is the shortest player on the team. But his height is not the only thing that makes him stand out. He's not the only foreigner in BC Kiev — in fact, the team largely consists of foreigners — but he is the only Israeli player.

And he is the only Israeli who is believed to be playing in any professional sport in Ukraine this year. No Israeli has ever played in the NBA, but a few have starred on U.S. college teams.

When Nissim arrived in Kiev three months ago, his teammates were amazed at how little he ate and drank when they went out.

Nissim is not Orthodox, but he does not eat non-kosher meat and he is not keen on alcohol, he said. He ate mostly vegetables when he first got here.

"My non-Israeli teammates would say, with sympathy, that it must be so difficult for me not to be able to eat everything," recalls Nissim. "But it's something that's normal for me and what I feel good about."

Nissim has been away from Israel for three years, playing for basketball teams in France, in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, and now in Ukraine. He says being far from home has made him more religious.

"When you are in Israel, you are like everybody else, and you don't think about these things much," says Nissim, who prays every morning and tries to go to synagogue in Kiev every week. "But now, far away from Israel, holding on to my religion is the only thing that makes me closer to home."

It was tough for him in Rostov, where the Jewish community is small and kosher meat was difficult to obtain. But in Kiev, Nissim seems happy.

His best friend in Ukraine's capital is the director of the King David, the city's only kosher restaurant, and Kiev's Central Synagogue is about 300 yards from the apartment the team rents for him. Nissim may

be the only player on the team whose diet requires that the team's administration

bring kosher meals for every road trip, but he says he does not feel very different or awkward about it.

And it doesn't hurt that BC Kiev's sports director and an assistant coach are Israeli, too.

"BC Kiev is almost half-Israeli," jokes

sports director Rani Kahane, who took up the position a year ago. Kahane had 25 years of experience coaching Israeli junior and national basketball teams when BC Kiev's owner, Aleksandr Volkov, invited him to Kiev.

Kahane says he's been friends with Volkov, a Ukrainian businessman and a former NBA player, since 1989.

"He needed somebody to be with the team 24 hours a day," says Kahane, who left a high-ranking job at the Israel Electric Company to work for BC Kiev.

BC Kiev was formed by Volkov seven years ago and hopes to become one of the top basketball clubs in Europe, Kahane says.

And to do that, he jokes, he will not necessarily make the whole team Israeli.

Language isn't a problem: The players and coaches communicate with each other in English.

"Nationality in today's basketball does not really matter, as long as you've got a good player who fits in with the team," says Kahane. ■

ACROSS
THE FORMER
SOVIET
UNION

I try not to violate
Shabbat, but basketball
is the only thing I can
make an exception for.
Afik Nissim

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Russian rabbi: Mixed marriages evidence of harmony

A leading Russian rabbi said marriages between Russian Jews and Muslims are the best proof of possible interfaith harmony.

"Marriages between Muslims and Jews, there are so many of them, even among my acquaintances," Adolph Shayevich, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, said Thursday at an interfaith conference in Moscow.

Speaking at the same conference, a leading Russian Muslim cleric said Islam and Judaism can coexist because the two faiths share the same origins.

The conference, "Islam and Judaism: Perspectives for Dialogue and Cooperation," was co-organized by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and the Russian Council of Muftis.

Anti-terror legislation passes Senate committee

A U.S. Senate committee approved legislation that would enhance anti-terrorism cooperation between the United States, Israel, Great Britain and other nations.

By voice vote, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee passed the act Thursday.

The legislation, which now goes to the floor in both houses, has strong bipartisan support.

Church panelist compares Israelis to Nazis

A panelist at the Presbyterian Church USA's forum on the Middle East compared Israelis to Nazis. Salam al-Maryati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee, said Thursday that Israel was crowding Palestinians into conditions "like the Warsaw Ghetto," said Ethan Felson, assistant executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, who was in attendance.

The forum took place a day in advance of the Presbyterian Church USA's 217th General Assembly in Birmingham, Ala., where the group is slated to vote on its 2004 resolution to begin a "phased, selective divestment" from companies that do business with Israel.

Effort to expose P.A. treatment of Christians

Two congressional representatives are seeking their colleagues' support for a resolution condemning the alleged persecution of Christians by the Palestinian Authority.

The "Dear Colleague" letter sent this week by Reps. Michael McCaul (R-Texas) and Joe Crowley (D-N.Y.) said Christians around the world are at risk of losing access to the most ancient and holy Christian sites.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel's entry to International Red Cross teeters

Israel's acceptance into the International Red Cross movement may be in jeopardy.

The Swiss foreign minister and an official with the International Committee of the Red Cross both cited problems in brokering the deal which, if passed June 20-21, would end nearly six decades of Israeli exclusion from the movement because of pressure from Arab and Islamic nations.

Olivier Durr of the International Committee of the Red Cross said that the deal has been "complicated by a deteriorating situation in the Middle East," Reuters reported.

Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey reported problems in Israel with registering Palestinian ambulances, and allowing them to pass checkpoints.

Palestinians detained after failed abduction

Three Palestinians were arrested after they allegedly attempted to kidnap two Israeli teens.

The girls were waiting at a hitchhiking station in the West Bank on Thursday when the men, armed with a handgun, drove up in their car. One girl, Hadas Mann, ran away immediately and called Israeli security forces with her cell phone. The men tried to force the other girl, Emunah Shahar, into the car. She fought them off, suffering a light head wound. Meanwhile, an Israeli officer drove by, and the Palestinians drove off. Shahar is being treated at Jerusalem's Hadasah-University Hospital.

Egypt to the rescue?

Egypt reportedly proposed a plan that would dissolve the Hamas-led Palestinian government in favor of one headed by a more moderate businessman.

The proposal states that Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh should resign his post and appoint in his place a person acceptable to both Hamas and its rival, Fatah. One suggestion being floated is Nablus businessman Munib al-Masri, who received an offer from the late Yasser Arafat in 2004 to head the Palestinian government. According to Palestinian media reports, the proposal was drafted by Egypt in coordination with Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Reform leader won't meet Israeli president

Reform Rabbi Eric Yoffie is not planning to meet with Israeli President Moshe Katsav because Katsav has refused to address him as a rabbi. Yoffie, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, will not be among those Diaspora Jewish leaders who pay official visits to Katsav next week when they gather in Israel for the 35th Zionist Congress, Ha'aretz reported. Katsav has said in the past that until the Knesset officially recognizes the Reform movement, he will not do so.

Leaders contemplate future of world Jewry

Leaders of major Jewish organizations met to engage in long-term strategic planning for the Jewish people. The event held Wednesday and Thursday, which was convened by the Israel-based Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, examined the possible long-term futures of Israeli and world Jewry.

Meeting organizers recently came under fire for not including enough women in the conference, which was held at the Wye River Conference Center outside Washington. Although one woman attended as a guest of honor and at least one turned down an invitation, none participated in the actual discussions.

The institute, headed by Middle East expert Dennis Ross, was created by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

WORLD

Uzbek Jews murdered

Jewish leaders in Uzbekistan believe the murder of an assistant to the country's chief rabbi may have been motivated by anti-Semitism. But in a letter published by the AEN news agency, community leaders said it is too early to decide on the motives of the crime and warned against "premature conclusions" they fear may hurt the Jewish community in this Central Asian nation.

Karina Loifer, 20, and her mother, Svetlana, were found strangled June 8 in their apartment in the capital Tashkent. Karina Loifer was a secretary of Abe Dovid Gurevich, the chief rabbi of Central Asia.

Police investigating the crime believe it is a robbery without anti-Semitic overtones. According to the community leaders, a spokesman for the Uzbek government's Committee on Religious Affairs has warned Jewish leaders against "politicizing" the crime.