

IN THE NEWS
Israel: Hostage believed still alive

Israeli officials believe kidnapped soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit is alive.

Justice Minister Haim Ramon announced Wednesday that Shalit is alive, a day after a deadline set by his Palestinian captors passed.

Hamas rocket hits Ashkelon

A school in the Israeli city of Ashkelon came under Palestinian rocket attack. Hamas claimed responsibility for Tuesday night's launch, which caused no casualties but spread fear in Israel that Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip have made significant progress in expanding the range of their rockets.

Ashkelon is seven miles from northern Gaza, and security sources said the Kassam rocket that landed in the empty school was powered by two motors rather than the usual one.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whose efforts to retrieve a kidnapped Israeli soldier from Gaza so far have failed to bear fruit, pledged to hit Hamas hard.

Expert lauds kosher slaughterhouse

An expert in slaughtering practices says a U.S. kosher slaughterhouse under fire for its procedures has "made a lot of improvements."

Temple Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University, made the comments to JTA on Wednesday after visiting the Agriprocessors plant in Iowa.

Grandin was allowed into the plant recently after more than a year and a half of pressure from PETA, the animal-rights group. She said the plant, whose kosher practices are monitored by the Orthodox Union, has instituted a quality-assurance lab, built a room for processing meat and has improved its handling of animals.

WORLD REPORT

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Misplaced titles, rejected degrees: Are Israel, Diaspora in family feud?

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — An American rabbi walks into the office of the Israeli president and the president says, "Hello, rabbi."

It may sound like the set-up to a good, old-fashioned Jewish joke, but if it is, it's got an unusual punch line. That's because when a similar, banal-seeming exchange took place last week in Israel, it seemed like a political breakthrough.

In a meeting at his office on June 28, Israeli President Moshe Katsav referred to Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, as "rav," the Hebrew honorific for a rabbi.

A few weeks earlier, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, had refused to meet the president after Katsav refused to call him rabbi, saying he was bound by state regulations that recognized only the ordination of Orthodox rabbis.

The spat touched on longstanding frustration among non-Orthodox Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. Because the Orthodox chief rabbinate largely controls religious life, non-Orthodox Jews — and their rabbis — often feel treated as second-class citizens.

The brouhaha comes on the heels of several other developments over the last couple of months — including some that involve tensions between Orthodox institutions in America and in Israel — that have some in the Jewish community publicly fretting over a widening schism between Israelis and American Jews.

"The fact is there is a growing rift and it's incumbent upon all of us to understand why and work to find ways to bridge that growing gap," said David Borowich, founder and chairman of Dor Chadash, a group that aims to act as a bridge between Israeli and American Jews.

Otherwise, he added, "It will only get worse."

In May, the Israeli rabbinate said it would no longer automatically recognize conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis from North America. The move angered

many in the community who felt the rabbinate was questioning their legitimacy. It further worried some liberal Jews who said that if Orthodox rabbis were being so treated, it could not bode well for them.

That same month, Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua told an audience of American Jews that Jewish life is experienced more completely in Israel than anywhere else. The comments set off a firestorm of angry recriminations from Diaspora Jews who felt that, once again, they were being assigned second fiddle.

Furthermore, it has become clear that a year after agreeing to do so, Israel's Ministry of Education still is not recognizing academic degrees earned by graduates of New York's Yeshiva University, an Orthodox institution. In remarks to the Knesset's Education Committee on June 25, the university's president, Richard Joel, called the policy "inconceivable" and "unacceptable."

Taken together, this series of events has highlighted for many the sense that Israelis and American Jews do not understand each

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ *Is a widening schism between Israelis and American Jews threatening Jewish unity?*

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other very well. This may be particularly true on matters relating to the non-Orthodox movements, which, while numerically dominant in the United States, are relatively small in Israel and not well known among many Israelis.

"Israel is growing as a society unto itself, with its own cultural milieu, and the Diaspora is growing in its way," Joel told JTA, stressing that the Y.U. situation was more bureaucratic than political. "To believe that somehow Israel is, culturally, the 51st state is, I think, unreasonable."

The gap, he added, is likely born of several factors, including the profoundly divergent political situations each group faces.

"Not having the constant pressure of the enemy at the borders has created a different reality for us than it has for Israelis," he said.

"We just expect that we have the right to weigh in on issues," Joel continued. "They say, 'We're glad you're interested, but you don't live here.' We say, 'But this is our homeland.' They say, 'Then how come you're not living in your homeland?'"

■

Borowich concurs.

"There's mutual frustration," he said. "Americans have this tendency to tell Israel how they want things run and Israelis have the tendency to do whatever they want. We both push each others' hot buttons. Both sides are at fault."

Still, Borowich said, the schism is not surprising. He likens the two groups to

distant cousins — one who left Europe or North Africa and headed to the ancestral Jewish homeland, and another who made his way to the United States. Then both had kids. And their kids had kids.

"How many people are close to their third cousins?" he asked.

Epstein, for his part, said the Katsav situation does not represent evidence of a major rift.

Nevertheless, "It could become a schism and that's why I went to have this meeting — to try to prevent it," he said. "It's very easy to let a schism occur. It will take all sides working together" to prevent it.

During the course of his meeting with Katsav, Epstein said, the two men engaged in a cordial, honest exchange.

"I'm not asking you to let me be your posek," or religious arbiter, "or your teacher, but I'm asking you from the bottom of my heart to regard me as my community does, as a rabbi and a rav," Epstein said he told the president.

During the last 15 minutes of their talk, Epstein said, Katsav made the switch and began referring to him as "rav."

■

In the aftermath of the Epstein meeting, a spokesman for Katsav said this was, in fact, representative of the president's policy.

"President Katsav calls all rabbis of all streams by their title, rabbi," Akiva Tor told JTA. He declined to say more, and it remains unclear whether it represents a policy change or whether Katsav makes a distinction between Reform and Conservative rabbis.

Katsav had initially offered to use the appellation "Reform rabbi" in addressing Yoffie.

For his part, Yoffie is looking for a more clear-cut response to his concerns.

Katsav's resolution with Epstein "means that he backed away from a

position that he had stated so emphatically," Yoffie said. Nevertheless, "his failure to very specifically indicate that Reform rabbis will also be called by their religious title is distressing and while this is progress, it's insufficient progress."

Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, says the dispute between Yoffie and Katsav was constructive in that it drew attention to "the essential and crucial theo-

logical gulf between the Jewish religious tradition and contemporary Jewish theologies that compromise it."

In the end, he concludes, "Sometimes words have discrete, and even disparate, meanings.

"A rose, to be sure, is a rose. But a rabbi is not necessarily a rabbi, and surely not necessarily a rav," he writes. "Whatever one chooses to call them, teachers of the Torah's divinity and halachah's unchanging nature are in a different theological universe from those who teach rejection of those ideas."

■

Meanwhile, Arye Mekel, Israel's consul general in New York, said that Israeli representatives abroad address rabbis from all the various denominations as rabbi.

"There are no instructions for any of us to make any differentiation," he told JTA staff in a meeting on June 28.

Mekel said he does not see evidence of an Israeli-Diaspora rift. Indeed, he said, he believes the "partnership is becoming more evident."

"It has become clearer what is the role of American Jewry and the role of Israel," he said.

"Your role is to support the State of Israel, because it is the Jewish state," he added. "At the same time, our role is to assist you and your No. 1 problem, which is Jewish continuity." ■

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New Darfur rally planned

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Organizers of April's Save Darfur rally in Washington are planning another large-scale event to draw attention to the continuing genocide in Sudan.

The second protest will be held in New York City on Sept. 17 and, like its predecessor, will be orchestrated by the Save Darfur Coalition, a collection of 150 faith-based advocacy and humanitarian aid organizations.

Discussions also are in place to stage rallies across the country that day, as well as in Europe and Canada.

Unlike the first rally, which was aimed at President Bush and policymakers on Capitol Hill, this event will court a more international audience. Rally director Chuck Thies said it will focus on the demand for the United Nations, which will be meeting in Manhattan that week, to deploy a peace-keeping force to Darfur.

In addition, Thies said there will be a push to make sure attendees represent an "international community." He said the coalition will hold community roundtables in New York's immigrant neighborhoods, advertise in non-English speaking newspapers and strive to include world music acts on the lineup.

The push for greater diversity begs the question: How will Jews, who played such a large role in the Washington rally, figure into the equation?

The answer, for the most part, is that it's too early to tell, since most groups say they won't flesh out their plans until more details, such as the event's location, are determined.

Still, agencies such as the American Jewish World Service and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, both of which sit on the coalition's executive committee, have pledged their support.

Martin Raffel, JCPA's senior associate executive director, said he expects the Jewish community to again leave its mark on the event.

"I believe the commitment of the Jewish community on this issue is deep and sustained," he said. "I believe a response to the event in September will be powerful."

With a grass-roots network for Darfur mobilization up and running in the Jewish community, a call to arms may be easier to

sound this time around, he said.

Gitta Zomorodi, senior policy associate at the AJWS, said Jewish groups may be inclined to rely on this existing infrastructure.

Though she said key players, such as AJWS President Ruth Messinger, may use their contacts to reach out to leaders in other religious or ethnic communities, "generally speaking it works better when we play to our strength, and that's with the Jewish community."

Raffel agreed.

"Our principal responsibility is to work within the Jewish community," he said. "To the degree that we have relationships outside the Jewish community, we'll certainly take advantage of those relationships."

While he hoped that other groups "will be encouraging greater participation from their end," Jews don't need to tone down their level of involvement, Raffel said.

"A question I often get is, 'Are we over-participating?'" Raffel said. "The answer to that is no. It's genocide. It's not surprising this has hit a chord in the community. If we're taking a leadership role, then I say so with great pride."

The Save Darfur Coalition was co-founded by the AJWS and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004. The

FOCUS ON ISSUES

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museum issued a genocide alert for Darfur even before the U.S. government did; Messinger has led two trips to the war-torn region.

The Washington rally, which included speeches by Jewish notables like Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, Hollywood stars like George Clooney and politicians like U.S. House of Representatives Minority leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), placed a spotlight on the situation in Sudan.

The conflict, which began in 2003, has left as many as 400,000 people dead. Government-backed Arab militias are responsible for systemically killing, raping and torturing black Africans in Darfur. Many Darfuris now live in makeshift refugee camps, where famine and disease are endemic.

The Sudanese conflict constitutes the first time the United States government has recognized genocide while it's still occurring.

Since the last rally, the situation on the ground has not seen drastic improvement,

despite the signing of a peace agreement on May 5. The agreement calls for disarming the government-backed Janjaweed militias by October, as well as downsizing the largest rebel faction, but there have been problems in achieving a cease-fire.

Many have called for a U.N. peacekeeping force to replace ill-equipped African Union troops on the ground. September's rally will underscore that point. ■

Israelis remember Entebbe

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israelis marked the 30th anniversary of the Entebbe rescue operation. This year's celebrations of the July 4, 1976, dispatch of commandos to extract more than 100 Jewish hostages held by pro-Palestinian plane hijackers in Uganda were overshadowed by the crisis over an Israeli soldier kidnapped in the Gaza Strip.

But lawmakers gathered at a commemorative Knesset session said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's refusal to negotiate with the Gaza hostage-takers was consistent with the spirit of Entebbe. "Today, as then, Israel

stuck to its policy of not making compromises with terrorism or the murderers who want to hurt us," Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik said.

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, whose brother Yoni was killed while leading the Entebbe rescue, said that fateful day had guided his political career. "He changed the course of my life, and set it on its current course," said Netanyahu, a former prime minister. "Until my last day, I shall carry the stamp of Yoni's courageous spirit and bravery." ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Wall prayer area to be expanded

The women's section at Jerusalem's Western Wall is to be expanded. Responding to requests by female worshipers at Judaism's most important shrine, Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski this week ordered the women's section expanded to make it equal in size to the men's section.

"There's no reason that in the most sacred site for the Jewish people, the men will have a big comfortable plaza while the women will have to be cramped and crowded," Lupolianski said in a statement Wednesday.

The mayor asked for government permission to change the route of the "Mugrabi Path," which leads from the Western Wall plaza to the Temple Mount, in order to carry out the renovations.

Palestinian bombing foiled

Israeli forces foiled a Palestinian bombing in the West Bank. A suspected bomber and at least one accomplice were arrested near the Ariel settlement after the Shin Bet received a tip Wednesday.

The Palestinian was believed to be planning to plant a bomb in an Israeli city and then detonate it remotely.

West Bank fugitive killed

Israeli forces killed a fugitive Palestinian terrorist in the West Bank. Troops raided a village outside Jericho on Wednesday, shooting dead a local Al-Aksa Brigade leader when he tried to evade arrest.

The dead man, who was wanted for a 2001 attack in the Galilee that killed two people, had recently joined the Palestinian Authority police. Military sources said a mortar launcher was found in his house.

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Arrests in Asheri murder

Israeli troops arrested three Palestinian suspects in last week's abduction and killing of a West Bank teen.

The three Fatah members were detained late Monday in Ramallah, where Eliyahu Asheri's body was found after he was kidnapped while hitchhiking.

The suspects are believed to have been working on the orders of the Popular Resistance Committees, a Gaza-based terrorist group that claimed responsibility for the attack on the 18-year-old resident of the settlement of Itamar.

One of those arrested was also wanted in connection with a planned suicide bombing.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. thanks Turkey for hostage intervention

The United States thanked Turkey for urging Syria to intervene in the case of a kidnapped Israeli soldier.

"What Turkey did that was very helpful is to go to Damascus and to say to the Syrians they need to use all of their leverage to help this take place," Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, said

Wednesday in a joint appearance in Washington with her Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gul.

It was not clear when Turkey made the appeal. Gunmen affiliated with the Palestinian Authority's ruling Hamas party kidnapped Cpl. Gilad Shalit and killed two other soldiers on June 25.

Israel believes Khaled Meshaal, a Hamas leader who lives in Damascus under Syrian protection, ordered the kidnapping. Israel began launching strikes on Gaza last week to force Shalit's release.

The United States has enlisted the international community's help to ratchet down tensions.

Lawyer in Swiss bank case defends self

A lawyer defended himself against criticism of his bill in the Swiss banks settlement.

"This is money I've earned," Burt Neuborne told the New York Sun.

The New York Times recently criticized Neuborne, who is asking for \$4.1 million — a rate of \$700 per hour — for his efforts that helped lead to the \$1.25 billion settlement in 1998.

A magistrate judge in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn is determining how much Neuborne should receive.

WORLD

Polish leader marks pogrom

Poland's president commemorated the 60th anniversary of a postwar pogrom in Poland.

Lech Kaczynski was ill and could not attend Tuesday's unveiling of the monument in Kielce but his address, read by his adviser, lamented "the undeniable facts that there were victims — citizens who were murdered, gunned down or tormented to death. It is their senselessly and cruelly snuffed-out lives that call out today for our memory and justice.

That is what bids us to speak the truth and draw lessons from the past."

He noted that debate has reopened about what spurred the event.

"I want to state clearly and forcefully: What occurred in Kielce 60 years ago was a crime. It was a disgrace. It is a great shame and tragedy for Poles and for Jews, so few of whom had survived Hitler's Holocaust.

There can be no justification for this crime."

Israeli rabbi presses parley

One of Israel's chief rabbis called on participants at an interfaith meeting in Moscow to condemn those who deny Israel's right to exist. "Unfortunately, there are leaders in the world who deny the Holocaust and speak of a genocide only when it comes to themselves," Yona Metzger said Monday afternoon to participants in the World Religious Summit conference.

The conference ended Tuesday.

Metzger apparently was referring to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has made comments threatening Israel and denying the Holocaust.

More than 200 clerics from 40 countries participated in the event, initiated by Russian Orthodox Church leaders. Speaking at the opening session, Russian President Vladimir Putin said tolerance and freedom of religion are important measures of social progress in today's Russia.

"The relations between religious groups and the state in our country are based on the equality of all religious organizations before the law, on nonintervention of the state in religious affairs," Putin said.