

## IN THE NEWS

**Violence escalates in northern Gaza**

At least 20 Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed in the Gaza Strip as Israel pressed an incursion aimed at stopping cross-border rocket fire. Most of the Palestinian fatalities were gunmen who attacked Israeli armored forces as they moved into northern Gaza on Thursday.

At least three Hamas terrorists died in an Israeli airstrike on the southern town of Khan Yunis. An Israeli soldier, shot in the head by a Palestinian sniper as his unit entered the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya in search of rocket crews, later died of his wounds. Israeli officials said the buffer zone set up early Thursday is a stopgap measure in light of the expanding range of Kassam rockets fired by Hamas terrorists.

**U.N. council slams Israel on Gaza**

The United Nations' Human Rights Council passed a resolution against Israel's current military incursion in the Gaza Strip.

Thursday's resolution by the new council condemns Israel's actions and asks for an immediate halt to "imposing collective punishment on the Palestinian civilians." The bill passed 29-11, with five abstentions. It makes no mention of Israeli Cpl. Gilad Shalit, kidnapped late last month from a base inside Israel by militants who also killed two Israeli soldiers, precipitating Israel's invasion. "It is absolutely unacceptable" that the resolution singles out just one side, Itzhak Levanon, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, told The Associated Press.

The resolution recommends that the council dispatch a fact-finding mission to report on alleged Israeli human rights violations, and calls for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Reformers who had hoped the new council would avoid its predecessor's obsession with Israel were disappointed.

# JTA WORLD REPORT

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Daystar

Evangelist preacher John Hagee, left, appears on Christian television network Daystar.

## A gift horse or a Trojan horse? Pro-Israel preacher goes a-lobbying

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — A Texas preacher is coming to Capitol Hill later this month with a present for the Jews: some 2,000 heartland Americans lobbying for Israel.

The question dogging the Jewish community now is what kind of gift horse Pastor John Hagee will be riding: The kind with the mouth better left unchecked, or the Trojan kind, unwrapping relations with the Christian right that many Jews would rather avoid.

Hagee, a televangelist who leads the 19,000 member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, has made his case to Jewish groups nationwide, most recently on a tour of Jewish communities in southern California.

His message: There would be absolutely no proselytizing or missionizing associated with

Christians United For Israel, the group he established in February to nationalize Christian pro-Israel lobbying.

Evangelical Christian support for Israel is not new — nor is the mixed Jewish response to the efforts. What appears different is the active lobbying network Hagee is trying to establish.

Some major Jewish groups say Hagee will be as good as his word, and enthusiastically endorse the group's lobbying day on July 19, which is expected to attract Israel-loving Christians from around the country.

"This organization is a sign of broad American support for the U.S.-Israel relationship," said Jennifer Cannata, a spokeswoman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, came

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ANALYSIS

## Jewish leaders are divided over whether Hagee has stopped proselytizing efforts

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away reassured from a briefing he hosted for Hagee.

"There's a stipulation that everyone has to sign on to who's attending," Hoenlein said. "There's not missionizing and proselytizing for anyone. We don't have to be skeptical about everything, sometimes good things do happen."

Among the skeptical is Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"His Web site and his record does not indicate that he has stripped himself of proselytizing efforts," Foxman said. "On the one hand, we need to welcome him. On the other, we need to be cautious about embracing it."

Hagee's Web site exhibits a degree of ambivalence about evangelism. On the one hand, under "Evangelism" on the "Beliefs" page it declares: "The Lord commands us to go out and make disciples of all the earth."

On the other, under "Israel and the Jewish People," on its FAQ page, it instructs Christians to "remember the debt of gratitude the Christian community owes to the Jewish community."

He is also affiliated with Daystar, the second-largest Christian network in the United States, which features a lineup that includes "messianic" Jews with long pro-conversion records.

When Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz, director of Jews for Judaism, raised this issue with Hagee at a Los Angeles meeting, Hagee's genial Southern folksiness took on a harder edge.

"If rabbis would put more emphasis on putting Jewish kids into Jewish schools, young Jews would never want to become Christians," Hagee said.

If anything, Hagee has taken heat for refusing to proselytize Jews, according to his closest Jewish friend in San Antonio, Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg of the Orthodox Congregation Rodfei Sholom.

"He's taken a number of positions that have run at times in conflict with other Christian groups on not proselytizing and non-missionizing," Scheinberg said.

Even some of Hagee's Jewish critics say he has kept his word on the proselytizing issue. The problem, they say, is Hagee's other baggage.

"It's immoral to be involved with Pastor Hagee when many of his activities are bad for the present and future of Jewish life in America," said Rabbi Barry Block, who is the senior rabbi at Temple Beth El in San Antonio.

Block says other Christian churches have marginalized the evangelist because of what they believe to be his extreme anti-Islam views and his strongly fundamentalist teachings on social issues like abortion and gay marriage.

His reported annual personal earnings — hovering in the high six figures, according to reports — are also looked at askance by some.

An alliance with Hagee poses a danger to Jews who seek to work with the broader community that is shunning him, Block says.

"He preaches an apocalyptic theology that most of my Christian colleagues find silly," Block said. "Whatever the Christian version is of 'shonda for the goyim,' " or disgrace in front of the gentiles, "that's how his Christian colleagues view him."

Block and others also take issue with Hagee's positions on Israel, which go against the policies of the Israeli government.

"Let's understand, too, that the Israeli policy favored by CUFJ and Pastor Hagee is rejected by people in Israel," Block said, referring to Hagee's opposition to withdrawal

from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Marvin Nathan, the chairman of the ADL's national civil rights committee, says Hagee's domestic views make him unacceptable.

"Hagee has his right to honor Israel and raises millions of dollars, but then on Sunday, when you turn on your television, he's talking about women who have abortions and gays and lesbians that are ruining children's lives," Nathan said, referring to Hagee's annual "Night to Honor Israel" in Texas.

The problem with sidelining Hagee, say Jewish leaders who are friendly to him, is that the minister's support for Israel is so substantial that he becomes impossible to ignore.

Hagee's strong pro-Israel track record speaks for itself, say his allies.

In 1978, in the first of 21 trips to Israel, "I went as a tourist and returned as a Zionist," Hagee said.

Last month, he visited Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego to enlist support for his pro-Israel group among Jews.

Addressing the Board of Rabbis of Southern California in Los Angeles, Hagee outlined two major projects, in addition to the Washington summit:

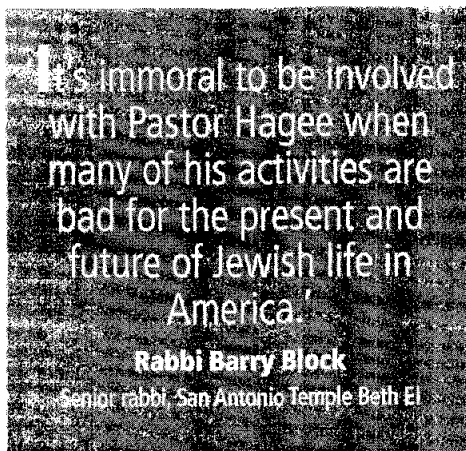
- Expand the existing network of 12,000 pastors, who can mobilize their congregations instantly to flood the White House and Congress with e-mails on any legislation affecting Israel's well-being.
- Institute an annual "Night to Honor Israel" in every major American city.

Hagee and his followers have given a total of \$8.5 million to Israeli causes.

Ultimately, for many Jewish leaders, Hagee's unquestioned support for Israel is the bottom line.

"I have absolutely no reservation when we deal with John Hagee or anyone else in the evangelical community," said Lee Wunsch, the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston who is close to Hagee and helped him launch his new group in February. "Israel needs all the friends it can get." ■

JTA correspondent Tom Tugend in Los Angeles and Matthew E. Berger in Washington contributed to this story.



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# Groups struggle with Falash Mura delay

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ever since the Israeli government decided a year and a half ago to accelerate Ethiopian immigration, the Jewish agencies and federations working on the issue have waited for the government to make good on its promise.

As months passed without any action, the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella organization voted to raise \$100 million for Ethiopian aliyah and absorption. Last June's pledge, part of a \$160 million special campaign called Operation Promise, was intended in part to pressure the government to implement its decision to double the pace of Ethiopian aliyah, to 600 people per month.

Last month, however, an Israeli interministerial committee voted to put the brakes on the plan, possibly until well into 2007. The reason, according to Finance Minister Avraham Hirschson: not enough cash.

The latest delay has left American Jewish leaders behind the Ethiopian campaign frustrated and impatient.

"Obviously, it slows a lot of things down," said Stephen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.

"We don't believe there's a significant economic difference to the Israeli state, because these people are going to be coming eventually," Hoffman said. "We think it's not a financial issue, it's a timing issue."

On average, each Ethiopian immigrant costs the State of Israel approximately \$100,000 over the course of his or her lifetime, according to government estimates.

John Ruskay, executive vice president of UJA-Federation of New York, said some Israeli and U.S. Jewish observers suspect that the current government has no intention of implementing its predecessor's decision on the Falash Mura.

Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet voted twice — in February 2003 and January 2005 — to expedite Ethiopian aliyah and bring to Israel all eligible Falash Mura remaining in Ethiopia. So far, the only official word from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's current government was the vote to delay the plan.

"Some Israeli observers believe this decision was deferred," Ruskay said. "Others believe that the prior government's decision was reversed. It's uncertain."

In a letter to U.S. Jewish officials, Zeev Bielski, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, who was at the interministerial committee meeting, called it a question of "if and when the final decision is made." The committee deferred the decision until "after the priorities of the 2007 budget are settled in the coming months," Bielski explained.

One reason for the delay is the government's preoccupation with other pressing problems, such as renewed conflict with the Palestinians. Ethiopian aliyah appears to be a low priority for attention and funding.

"It's a question of timing, not a question of implementation," insisted Doron Krakow, UJC's senior vice president for Israel and overseas affairs. "There's been no change in policy."

Federation officials say they'll continue to press hard for Ethiopian aliyah, partly by bringing money to the table.

"We're conducting the fund-raising now to show the government that we're ready to hold up our end of the deal," Hoffman said, echoing sentiments expressed a year ago by UJC CEO Howard Rieger.

But the fund-raising effort has been complicated by the delay, in part because donors were promised an expedited aliyah operation that hasn't yet happened.

In New York, for example, the local federation's pledge to Operation Promise is contingent on Israel accelerating the pace of Ethiopian aliyah. Because that hasn't happened, New York hasn't yet sent any of its \$5.3 million pledge for Operation Promise to UJC, though UJA-Federation of New York continues to support Ethiopian aliyah and absorption projects through its regular annual budget.

In any case, a steady stream of 300 Ethiopians continues to arrive in the Jewish state each month. Even if the rate is never doubled, all the aliyah-eligible people left in Ethiopia may have made it to Israel by 2010.

In the meantime, Ethiopians in Addis Ababa and Gondar continue to petition to immigrate to the Jewish state.

The petitioners say they are Ethiopians of Jewish ancestry whose progenitors converted to Christianity several generations ago to escape social and economic pressures. Now they have begun returning to Judaism in a bid to emigrate, along with their extended families, to the Jewish state. Israel calls these people Falash Mura.

The Falash Mura's Jewish pedigree is virtually impossible to prove. Unlike Ethiopian immigrants who came to Israel in Operations Moses and Solomon in 1984 and 1991, the Falash Mura have not maintained Jewish traditions and practice, so Israel has been accepting only those Falash Mura who can demonstrate a familial connection with Ethiopians already in Israel.

It's not clear exactly how many Falash

Mura remain in Ethiopia, though aid officials say the number is likely not more than 13,000. However, the Jerusalem Post last year found indications that tens of thousands more Ethiopians with ties to

Jewish ancestry are living in the Ethiopian highlands.

Some Israeli officials stationed in Ethiopia and American Jewish federation leaders who have gone on fact-finding missions to Ethiopia say it's essential to bring the current group of Falash Mura as quickly as possible so the number of petitioners for aliyah stops growing.

For their part, Jewish aid and advocacy officials say the Falash Mura must be brought to Israel as quickly as possible because they suffer from extremely poor living conditions in Ethiopia.

"The delay in aliyah will result not only in prolonging suffering in Ethiopia, but cause a delay in absorption" of the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, said Orlee Guttman, director of operations for the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, which maintains aid operations in Gondar.

The delays also have postponed a planned transfer of Jewish aid operations in Ethiopia from NACOEJ to the Jewish Agency. As a consequence, since March the UJC has been providing \$50,000 per month to NACOEJ to help it maintain its aid compound in Gondar, UJC officials said.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

The Falash Mura's Jewish pedigree is virtually impossible to prove.

# Brazilian kosher agency flexes muscle

By MICHAEL KEPP

RIO DE JANEIRO (JTA) — A new group of rabbis offering kosher certification to Brazilian food companies is finding plenty of takers, despite the fact that no more than 20 percent of the country's 150,000 Jews keep kosher.

With such a small local market, why are Brazilian companies going kosher?

For one, it doesn't cost a lot. More importantly, companies that get certification also can export to foreign kosher markets, potentially gaining access to millions of customers around the globe.

Beit Din Kashrut, or BDK, has certified some 500 products since its inception in 2004. All are listed on BDK's Web site, and 50 have a physical seal affixed on the product package.

Given the small number of local kosher consumers, Brazilian food companies aren't likely to think about kosher certification on their own. But BDK, a group of five rabbis based in Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city, promotes its service, approaching companies and explaining that kosher certification will not only open up a local niche market but also will give them access to foreign areas with large Jewish populations, such as the United States and Israel.

Often the companies don't have to change any ingredients or manufacturing processes. BDK charges about \$1,000 for the seal, which Rabbi Rony Gurwicz called "a symbolic cost" that covers overhead.

"Because the world has 20 million kosher-keeping people, only 12 million of whom are Jewish, the seal can also attract non-Jewish customers looking for food which is produced under more rigorous sanitary conditions," Gurwicz said — a point he stresses in his pitch to food companies.

Vilma Alimentos, a producer of chocolate powder, spaghetti and cake and soup mixes, got the BDK seal for its spaghetti and chocolate powder last year. It expects to increase domestic sales of those products by \$1.8 million by July.

"We got the BDK seal for these products as a marketing strategy, which seems to be working," said Cesar Tavares, Vilma Alimentos' vice president of sales and marketing. "The estimated sales increase for these products appear to show that they are being bought both by Jews and non-Jews" for

sanitary and quality reasons.

Dr. Oetker, a German producer of domestic-market puddings, flans and cake/pancake mixes, has had 23 products certified.

"We aren't really concerned that the local market for such products is quite small," said Luc Van End, the company's commercial director. "We're just interested in penetrating that market by selling our kosher products in supermarkets and in more than 20 kosher food stores in Brazil."

Before BDK started up, the main certification group was the Brazilian Kashrus Authority, or

BKA. BKA is headed by Rabbi Meir Avraham Iliovits, who has been the driving force behind kosher certification in Brazil since the 1970s. Iliovits heads Kehilas Hachareidim, a small Orthodox community in Sao Paulo.

BKA has certified some 1,000 products in its 35 years, 50 of which carry a BKA seal. The products also are listed on a Web site.

Both BDK and BKA say they're not for profit. BKA asks only for donations and expenses for its 20 certifiers.

Iliovits said both groups "provide the same valuable public service for Brazilian Jews wanting to keep kosher — the difference being that I've been doing this for 35 years and BDK has been doing it for two years."

Gurwicz turns that to his advantage.

"The main difference is that BKA has certified 1,000 products in 35 years and BDK has certified 500 products in two years," he said.

While most kosher-certified foods don't cost more, some may. For the past six years, milk producer Nilza Alimentos has had BKA certify a small amount of its milk, which sells for twice as much as non-certified milk because Nilza must pasteurize the kosher milk in separate production lines after its machines have been cleaned of non-kosher milk, and pay supervisors.

Despite the mark-up, "there is an up-

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD



Vilma Alimentos

A Brazilian chocolate powder drink produced by Vilma Alimentos that is now certified kosher by a new Brazilian kashrut authority, Beit Din Kashrut, or BDK.

scale, niche market for that product here," said Marcelo Nogueira, Nilza Alimentos' industrial director.

BDK Rabbi Daniel Touitou has certified Brazilian-made smoked beef jerky that is to be exported to the United States, where there is only one kosher-certified smoked beef jerky producer, he said.

He also has certified chocolate, made by Copenhagen Chocolates, an upscale Brazilian chocolate producer, for export to the United States and Israel. He has done so simply by checking the ingredients and rejecting chocolate candies made with wine-based alcohol.

"Much, if not most, of the products BDK certifies are for the export market because it is much, much bigger than the domestic market," Touitou said. "Still, those Brazilians Jews who do want to buy kosher-certified products, like fine chocolates," can do so now.

With such a small local market, why are Brazilian companies going kosher?

# From Jewish haven to ghost town

By LARRY LUXNER

PARAMARIBO, Suriname (JTA) — Until recently, Paramaribo had two ancient synagogues famous for their distinctive architecture and sand-covered floors.

Hard times, however, forced the shrinking Jewish community in Suriname, in the north of South America, several years ago to lease out the smaller of the two shuls, Tzedek V'Shalom, for \$3,500 a month. Once all the Jewish ritual objects inside were removed and shipped off to Israel's Diaspora Museum, a local computer firm converted the Sephardi synagogue into an Internet cafe.

"We rented it out because we need the money.

A small community like this can't afford two synagogues," said Jules Donk, president of the remaining congregation, Neve Shalom. "We just couldn't maintain it anymore."

Beginning more than 350 years ago, the former Dutch colony on the northern fringes of the Amazon was a haven for persecuted Jews. Now its Jewish community, comfortable as ever in this diverse country, is struggling, hurt by dwindling funds and membership.

"We're the oldest existing Jewish community in the Americas, but the rest of the Jewish world doesn't care about us," said Lilly Duym, who manages Neve Shalom. "We don't get any help, that's why we had to close the other synagogue and rent out the building. Otherwise, we'd have no income."

Since 1975, when the Netherlands cut loose its former colony, GDP has fallen precipitously, and most of the hundreds of thousands of Surinamese who fled to Holland after independence — including most of the Jews — never returned.

The country is still recovering from the effects of a civil war that raged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As in many countries, drug trafficking has become a serious problem, as has crime, which the locals blame on itinerant Brazilian gold-miners.

Yet unlike the rest of South America — which is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic — religion in Suriname takes many forms. And everyone gets along.

"No religion in Suriname has any problem with any other religion," says Guido Robles, a prominent Jewish businessman in

Paramaribo. "All the problems are caused by the politicians."

Portuguese-speaking Sephardi Jews first came to Suriname around 1660 — before the Dutch — to escape the Inquisition in neighboring Brazil. They prospered in the new climate of tolerance, and many Jews became wealthy slaveowners.

The ruins of the B'racha V'Shalom synagogue, built in 1685, still attract researchers and archaeologists to Jodensavanna, a site deep in Suriname's sparsely populated wilderness south of Paramaribo.

Thanks to heavy immigration from India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, about 27 percent of

Suriname's 480,000 inhabitants today profess Hinduism. That makes it the leading religion, though Islam is also prominent, due to the colonial practice of importing laborers from the Indonesian island of Java to work the rice paddies and sugar plantations.

There also are Dutch Protestants and Chinese Buddhists, as well as Creoles, Maroons and Amerindians.

Duym said she's never experienced anti-Semitism. In fact, Suriname's 200 or so remaining Jews are highly respected members of the community. A number of words

of distinctly Hebrew origin have even crept into Sranantongo, the local dialect, such as "abuda kaba" (hard work) and "treef" (forbidden food).

Nowhere is this diversity more striking than along Paramaribo's Keizerstraat, where Congregation Neve Shalom and the adjacent Suriname Islamic Society mosque coexist peacefully.

The Javanese mosque is the largest of hundreds scattered throughout Suriname, but Neve Shalom — built in 1719 and rebuilt in 1835 after a fire — is the only functioning synagogue left in the country.

To preserve its future in the face of dwindling numbers and proselytizing, Neve Shalom gradually has gone from Orthodox to liberal over

the years, accepting mixed-marriage couples and non-Jews.

But that hasn't helped. Today, the congregation has only 125 members.

Donk isn't optimistic about the future of Judaism in Suriname. But he's not ready to throw in the towel just yet.

Asked about Tzedek V'Shalom, the

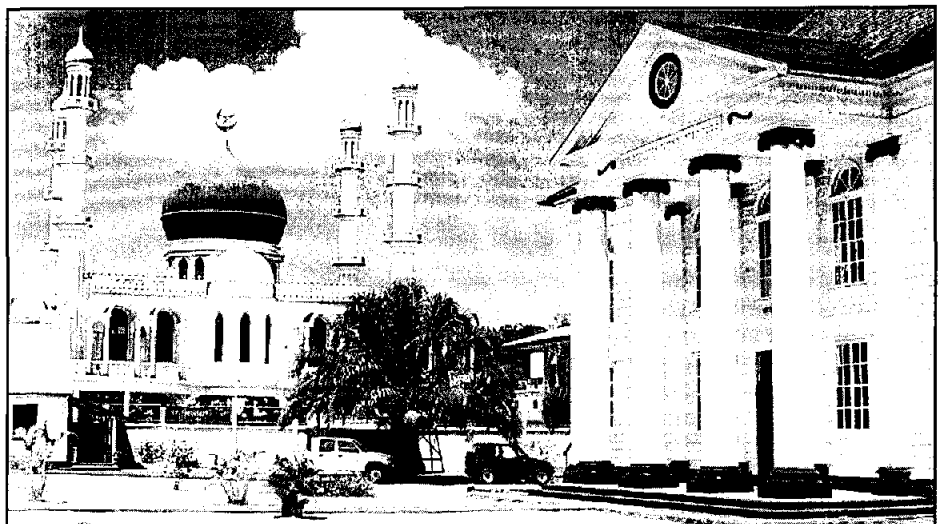
community leader insisted: "It's impossible for us to maintain right now, but we won't ever sell it. Maybe someday it will become a synagogue again. You never know." ■

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

**'We're the oldest existing Jewish community in the Americas, but the rest of the Jewish world doesn't care about us.'**

**Lilly Duym**

Member, Suriname Jewish community



Larry Luxner

The ancient Jewish community of Suriname is now reduced to perhaps 200 Jews and one synagogue, Neve Shalom, at right.

# Tumult at Prague Jewish school

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — When 12 out of 24 teachers at a school quit after a change in administration, it's not just typical turnover.

Welcome to Prague, which has the Czech Republic's only Jewish school, one that has gone through great turmoil in recent years and one that the community and principal are trying to rebuild.

"We want this to be a Jewish school with a great reputation, and we want highly qualified teachers, and we want not to waste money as it seems was going on before," said Katerina Dejmalova, principal of the Ronald S. Lauder Elementary and High School in Prague.

The mass teacher exodus comes at a time when the school and Prague Jewish community of some 1,500 are still trying to heal from bruising political partisanship that split the community over leadership, rabbinical authority and how money should be allocated.

The school is perhaps the last frontier of this battle, as a new community board, through Dejmalova, seeks to professionalize the teaching staff following a period of what she and current board members characterize as gross mismanagement.

In addition to 12 teachers who quit last Friday, some of whom did not like their work reassignments or reduced hours, two teachers were given notice. Four more are reportedly looking for other jobs.

Although the teachers criticized Dejmalova's changes as a form of "bullying," administrators say that the school will emerge with a better staff and a sounder budget.

Dejmalova was appointed earlier this year by a newly created school board who liked her promises of cost-cutting, performance-based pay and improvement of teacher credentials.

David Kostka, head of an association of Lauder parents, has an 18-year-old daughter at the school and supports Dejmalova's vision.

"I think it's good that the teachers are leaving. Dejmalova wants to bring a higher level of teachers to the school. I trust her as a manager," he said.

But the departures, teachers say, were

a result of the harassment they were experiencing under Dejmalova. The teachers union, which included most of the school's educators, submitted a complaint against Dejmalova last week to the country's Education Ministry, claiming that she was intimidating them and trying to get them to leave, demanding unnecessary qualifications or giving them inappropriate work assignments.

"She doesn't like us because we were hired under the previous administration," said Kristina Haylettova, an English teacher who is leaving the school. She added many teachers were hired by former principals who were endorsed by a faction of the Prague Jewish community that she claims is loathed by Dejmalova and the current leadership of the community.

The school's political troubles erupted three years ago when pornography was found on the school's Internet server and a popular teacher acting as principal was fired for the incident even though a former Webmaster confessed to downloading the material.

The handling of the situation was tainted by a concurrent battle for control of the Prague Jewish community, which runs the school. Teacher and student strikes followed. Since then, student enrollment declined from 194 to 130. One-third of the students are Jewish, one-third have some Jewish heritage and one-third are non-Jews.

Since its founding eight years ago with support from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which contributes 30 percent of its budget, the school has been through eight principals. But school officials such as the deputy vice principal, Lucie Soklova, say the teacher departures have nothing to do with the previous tension at the school.

"Most of those who quit did not like our new policy of paying teachers for the actual work they were doing," she said.

Seventeen part-time teachers at the school were getting full-time pay and full-time vacation, according to Soklova, and salaries that were much higher than those offered at Czech public schools.

"We will only have to find five teachers to replace those that are leaving, and this will be no problem," she said.

Leo Pavlat, director of the Jewish Museum in Prague as well as an advisor to the Lauder Foundation explained in an email, "I have full confidence that by the beginning of the new school year the highly qualified teaching staff will be completed... Mrs. Dejmalova's steps should be understood as purely technical and organizational measures without any personal connotation."

Haylettova claims the new administrators created a feeling of "terror" in

the school. She says, for example, that even though she has a master's degree from the University of Iowa, she was told that her degree is insufficient, even though a Western diploma is highly prized by most administrators.

She complained that a beloved art teacher was being

tormented by Dejmalova and that an experienced English teacher was told she had to teach gym.

Soklova countered that the certificate from the Czech Ministry of Education is required by law.

She added that the person asked to teach gym was not proficient in English, which JTA confirmed, and that the art teacher had been given eight years to get a bachelor's degree but had not done so.

One parent, Neuzil Ludek, said his daughter will not continue at the school "because its level of education was not good enough," which is the chief issue the new administration is trying to address.

Soklova looks around her office and admits the school looks dreary. "We know how the school should look. We will get there. Come back a year from now and see how different things are."

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THE JEWISH  
WORLD

The school's political troubles erupted three years ago when pornography was found on the school's Internet server and a popular teacher acting as principal was fired for the incident.

## COMMUNITY

## TRANSITIONS

■ Chicago businessman and philanthropist Charles Goodman was elected chairman of Hebrew University of Jerusalem's board of governors.

■ Miami Jewish Federation elected Saby Behar as its president. He was previously the federation's general campaign manager.

■ Tammy Shapiro was named director of the Union of Progressive Zionists.

■ Gerald Kleinman was named the American Technion Society's interim vice president of campaign.

■ Sandra Edwards was named associate director of the Jim Joseph Foundation.

■ Elise Bernhardt was named executive director of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

■ Rabbi Einat Ramon was named dean of Jerusalem's Schechter Rabbinical Seminary.

■ Steven Windmueller was appointed interim dean of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Los Angeles campus.

## HONORS

■ U.S. Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) was given the Rabbi Eliezer Silver Humanitarian Award for Distinguished Service in Fighting Hate at a ceremony at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.

■ Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, received the National Advocacy Award from the Genetics Policy Institute for its work in advocating for favorable stem cell legislation.

■ Rick Hodes, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's medical director for Ethiopia, was awarded an honorary degree by his alma mater, Middlebury College, for his medical work in the developing world.

■ Alexis Frankel was awarded JDC's Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship in International Jewish Communal Service. Frankel has been program director of University of Michigan, Ann Arbor's Hillel since 2004.

■ The American Jewish Committee's director of international Jewish affairs, Rabbi Andrew Baker, was awarded the Cross of Officer of the Order for Merits to Lithuania for his work in Lithuanian-Jewish and Lithuanian-American relations.

■ The National Foundation for Jewish Culture honored the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts and its founders, Dale and Doug Anderson and Andrea and Charles Bronfman; artist Shimon Attie; actor/singer Tovah Feldshuh; and poet Robert Pinsky.

■ Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life honored Abby Joseph Cohen and David Cohen at its annual dinner.

■ Gary Krupp, founder of the Pave the Way Foundation, was given the United Nations' Servant of the Peace Award.

■ Kevin Haworth won the Goldberg Prize for his novel, "The Discontinuity of Small Things."

## Interfaith adventure in Belarus

By YULIANNA VILKOS

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — They don't see many Americans in the Belarusian village of Vselyub. Certainly not many with weed-whackers in their hands.

So one hot afternoon earlier this month, village chairman Vasily Korol looked bewildered as he watched a group of American college students, helped by local schoolchildren, work to clean up the town's Jewish cemetery, abandoned since the Nazis killed the entire local Jewish population 65 years ago.

Some 160 gravestones with Hebrew writing had been set upright, and now stood in the sunlight, surrounded by a freshly painted aluminum fence featuring a big Jewish star above the entry gate. Just a few days earlier, Korol said, this was an empty field where kids played soccer.

And if that wasn't enough, Korol learned that none of these American visitors had relatives buried at the cemetery. They were students at a Catholic university in New York — the only Jew in the group was Michael Lozman, the 68-year-old New York orthodontist who organized the trip.

"Why are you doing this?" was all the puzzled Korol could ask. Lozman has been asked that question many times since he started bringing groups of American students to Belarus five years ago to restore abandoned Jewish cemeteries.

"Somebody has to do it," he answers. "Thousands of Jews did not return home from Nazi camps and are not able to take care of their cemeteries anymore. But we want to restore what we can, so our children and grandchildren have a place to come back to, to connect with their past," he says.

In 2001, Lozman cleaned up the Jewish cemetery in the Belarusian town of Sapeckin, where his grandparents are buried. Since then, he has arranged the restoration of five other Jewish cemeteries in Belarus as part of his nonprofit, Restoration of Eastern European Jewish Cemeteries Project. The work has been carried out by groups of American college students, Jews

and non-Jews together.

This year's project, Lozman says, is particularly significant for its interfaith dimensions. It's the first time he's brought an entirely non-Jewish group to the former Soviet republic — 10 students and two professors from Siena College near Albany, N.Y.

Ralph Blasting, Siena College's dean of liberal arts, supported the project but worried about finances. The students on Lozman's previous trips were sponsored by Hillel. The Siena students had to pay their own way and raise \$10,000 to cover

the cost of the fence.

Senior Christopher Begley says the trip gave him the opportunity "to actually make a change."

"When we walked in to what was supposed to be a cemetery, we saw maybe five or six stones, but by the end of the day we uncovered more than a hundred. It was a pretty amazing feeling," he says.

The students, for their part, feared they wouldn't be welcomed in Belarus because of the country's authoritarian political regime.

But the village school even held a competition for the best essay on the Holocaust.

According to Blasting, villagers — both adults and children — came to the cemetery every day during their weeklong stay, helping to fix the stones, clean up the brush and collect the garbage alongside the Americans.

After the dedication ceremony, during which Lozman recited Kaddish at the restored cemetery, the headmistress of the local school, Diana Tsverko, sounded uneasy when asked about her feelings.

"To be honest, I feel ashamed we hadn't done this before," she said. "It's a great lesson for us in how to respect the dead, no matter what religion they were. I know that the Jewish community of Vselyub consisted mainly of shopkeepers and was respected by the villagers for its charity work. I now feel moved to build an archive and learn more about them." ■

For more information, email [restorejcem@aol.com](mailto:restorejcem@aol.com).

ACROSS  
THE FORMER  
SOVIET  
UNION

'It's a great lesson for us in how to respect the dead, no matter what religion they were.'

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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Hostage's father talks with captors

The father of an Israeli soldier seized by Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip spoke by telephone with a representative of the captors. The left-wing Voice of Peace radio station on Thursday connected Noam Shalit and Abu Obaida, a spokesman for three Palestinian terrorist groups holding Shalit's son Gilad since June 25.

During the conversation, which was broadcast live, Shalit implored the captors in Hebrew to show "flexibility" in their ransom demands. Abu Obaida, answering in Arabic, said the captors "want to find a solution" to the hostage crisis, but that the onus was on the Israeli government to act first. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has refused the captors' demand for an initial release of hundreds of imprisoned Palestinians, calling it extortion.

### Hamas arrests in Jerusalem

Israeli police arrested four Hamas officials in the Jerusalem area. Those detained Thursday are suspected of coordinating Hamas political activity and possibly terrorism in Arab districts in northern Jerusalem.

The arrests brought to almost 70 the number of Hamas officials taken into Israeli custody since last week on terrorism charges. An Israeli military court Thursday extended by eight days the remand of four other detainees.

### Israeli Arab named envoy to Greece

An Israeli Arab was named the country's ambassador to Greece. Ali Yihye previously served as ambassador to Finland from 1995 to 1999.

Gideon Meir, who served as deputy director general for media and public affairs in Israel's Foreign Ministry, was named ambassador to Italy.

Ilan Elgar was named envoy to Switzerland, Isaac Bachman to Guatemala, Yosef Livne to Mexico and Tsurial Raphael to El Salvador.

Roi Rosenblit will head up Israel's delegation in Qatar and Nadav Tamir will be the consul general in Boston.

### Israelis help Indonesian victims

Volunteers from an Israeli nonprofit helped victims of a recent earthquake in Indonesia.

The volunteers from the Israeli Flying Aid team, whose work was cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee, provided children with post-traumatic stress disorder treatments and served two hot meals daily to 5,200 people.

The efforts in eight Muslim villages won approval from Indonesian government officials, as well as the local Muslim leadership, who asked for the group's help in reconstructing a mosque destroyed by the earthquake.

The activities weren't reported until now for fear of potential threats from Islamists.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Reform Jews launch campaign on Darfur

The U.S. Reform movement launched a campaign to urge permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to send a peacekeeping force to Darfur.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism announced Thursday that it's encouraging people worldwide to send "Blue Helmet" postcards to the Security Council's permanent members.

The Blue Helmets are an internationally recognized sign of U.N. peacekeepers.

The postcards push for U.N. forces to take over the current African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

### U.S. Jewish-Turkish meeting tense

U.S. Jewish leaders who met with the Turkish foreign minister disagreed sharply over Turkey's relations with Hamas. Participants in Wednesday's meeting with Abdullah Gul said it was unusually tense, with Jewish leaders questioning Turkey's insistence on defying the Western boycott of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority government.

Gul argued that such ties were useful to Israel, citing Turkey's recent, unsuccessful attempt to intervene with Hamas to free a captive Israeli soldier. Currently led by an Islamist-based party, Turkey relies on U.S. Jewish lobbying to maintain its profile in Washington.

Representatives of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, United Jewish Communities, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, B'nai B'rith International, Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee took part in the meeting.

### Reform criticize gay marriage ruling

A Reform Jewish leader criticized a New York Court of Appeals ruling rejecting the right of gays and lesbians to civil marriage.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of Reform Judaism's Religious Action Center, on Thursday called on the New York legislature to pass a law ensuring the right to civil marriage.

The group filed a brief on the plaintiff's behalf in the case.

## WORLD

### Paris square named for Herzl

A square in the heart of Paris was named for Zionist founder Theodor Herzl.

A corner in Paris' Third District was dedicated this week to Herzl, who became a Zionist while covering the 1896 trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a captain in the French military wrongly jailed on charges of spying for the German army.

The naming of the square comes as a series of events and museum exhibits in Paris commemorate Dreyfus, who was released from prison and given back his rank and pay 100 years ago.

### Poland shuts down neo-Nazi site

Polish police arrested the administrator of a neo-Nazi Web site and shut the site down. The move against the Polish version of the Blood and Honor site follows a small wave of extremist threats and violence in April and May, much of it linked to the group.

Police worked closely with U.S. authorities to discover the identity of the Polish administrator. Blood and Honor is a neo-Nazi group with supporters across Europe.

The Polish edition of Newsweek ran a cover story on the Polish branch of Blood and Honor in mid-June, estimating that it was one of the strongest of the group's subsidiaries, with hundreds of thousands of members.

### International Jewish 'Olympics' held in Australia

The inaugural Maccabi Australia International Games were held in Sydney this week. The worldwide Jewish sports organization now hosts international competitions in the United States, Europe, South America and Australia, headed by the Maccabiah in Israel every four years.

The opening ceremony was held before a packed audience in the Sydney Opera House and the main sporting venue was the Sydney Olympic Park, home of the 2000 Olympics. More than 600 athletes competed, with large teams coming from the United States and Israel.