

IN THE NEWS
Envoy: Jan. 1 deadline for Sudan

President Bush's envoy for the Darfur crisis says Sudan has until Jan. 1 to comply with international demands to end the conflict there.

Andrew Natsios met Thursday with a coalition of groups campaigning to end the massacre of civilians in Sudan's Darfur region carried out by government-allied Arab militias.

Natsios just returned from a 10-day tour of the region and met with Bush on Tuesday.

Bush said Sudan must understand that the international community is serious about allowing in peacekeepers.

Bush recently signed an act that would sanction Sudan until it complied, but he hasn't offered a deadline.

In Thursday's off-the-record meeting, attended by members of the Save Darfur Coalition, including at least four major Jewish groups, Natsios offered a Jan. 1 deadline, noting that that's when ineffectual African Union peacekeepers are due to withdraw.

Israel marks 11 years since Rabin's death

Israelis observed 11 years since Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated.

Official ceremonies Thursday marked the Hebrew calendar date of the anniversary of his death.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert addressed a special Knesset session, praising Rabin as a great leader and calling on those in the religious community who support pardoning Rabin's assassin to reflect on what the assassination meant.

"One doesn't have to be a devout follower of Yitzhak Rabin or a member of his ideological camp to esteem his leadership, his immense contribution to the fortification of Israel's security and his grand achievements as general and statesman," Olmert said.

WORLD REPORT

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BPH Images

Israelis enjoy good weather on a Tel Aviv beach in September.

Hoping to shed conflict image, Israel ponders branding campaign

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — What kind of image does the average American have of Israel?

According to recent focus groups, the picture of the Jewish state is a grim one: gray and fortress-like, militarized, male-dominated, uniformly religious and generally uninviting.

"They don't see anything of normal, everyday life," said Boaz Mourad, CEO of Insight, a research group that conducted focus groups in the United States. "All they see is conflict and religion."

With the help of some of the country's top advertising brains, the Foreign Ministry is hoping to "rebrand" Israel. The idea is to remold the country's public image — arguably

the worst in years — from a bloody cauldron of conflict to a vibrant, dynamic society brimming with night life, innovative businesses and attractive and welcoming people.

At a recent conference, government officials and international experts exchanged ideas on how to make that happen.

The concept of national branding, which began about 15 years ago, was borrowed from the advertising world when people began to wonder if the tools of product branding could be translated into promoting countries. The goal was to help countries craft a highly managed, positive international identity that would boost investment, tourism and international status.

Countries like Spain, Turkey and Croatia have launched branding campaigns to im-

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■ *With the help of some top advertising brains, Israel is trying to remold its public image*

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prove their images, aided by experts who helped them identify their major selling points and develop core messages that could be coordinated among government, business and cultural leaders.

"We, the Israelis, lost the ability to develop that overarching message," said Ido Aharoni, media advisor to Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. "And when we do have a message, we don't have the ability to do what is called 'message discipline.'"

Once a brand concept is developed for Israel, part of the challenge will be keeping all the players in line, Aharoni said — from squabbling government ministers on down.

Research commissioned by the Foreign Ministry shows most people know Israel exists — there's brand recognition, in marketing terminology — but other key factors are low, such as how well-liked Israel is and how relevant it is to people's lives.

"Israel is not perceived as fun or normal. Our job is to say, 'Yes, we are not normal, but we are far more normal than you think,'" Aharoni said.

For years Israel has worked to build political support, but government officials say that's not enough in today's global economy. Israel needs to be seen as a competitive place so that businesspeople and tourists see beyond the conflict when they think of Israel and see it as a place to invest and visit.

Advertising experts point to branding success stories of countries like Colombia, which has suffered a bloody drug war yet

still managed to build a positive image around its coffee industry, with the image of Juan Valdez on his donkey leading the way.

Another example is Croatia, which has risen from the Balkan conflict of the 1990s to become a major tourist destination with an image of beaches and picturesque towns.

But how can Israel repaint its image as a conflict zone as the seemingly intractable and violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues?

Guy Toledano, vice president of business development for Bauman Ber Rivnay Saatchi and Saatchi, says it could take 10 to 15 years — but that with the right approach, Israel could significantly shift its image in the world.

"What needs to happen is for us to find a framework filled with images, symbols and words, and this is tough work. It's what we call the essence," he said.

He pointed out images Britain used in its "Cool Britannica" branding campaign, of an Oxford student and a bartender at a pub. The goal was to give the sense of a country that was approachable and hip.

"Rabbis, soldiers and settlers — these are all images that don't provoke positive images," Toledano said, referring to the current cast of characters that those abroad believe are typical Israelis.

"Brands are about stories, and the story of Israel should be revised. It was once the

story of pioneers, of making the deserts bloom and the swamps disappear," he said.

But with the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967 and Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the world's image of Israel changed drastically for the worse, Foreign Ministry officials and others said.

Among the speakers at the conference was Larry Weinberg, executive vice president of Israel21c, which promotes stories of Israeli technological and scientific innovations that benefit Americans.

Weinberg said Israeli representatives must shift their focus from "hasbara," a concept that means public relations or propaganda and essentially refers to how Israel explains itself to the world. Officials long have assumed that if they can convince the world that Israel is right in its conflict with the Arabs, inter-

national support and positive feelings will follow.

"Clearly it hasn't worked," Weinberg said. "We need a change."

Weinberg believes his organization's approach helps Jews and others take pride in Israel.

Michael Peters, chairman of the Identica Partnership, a London-based branding company, said Israel's negative image is bad not just for Israel but for Diaspora Jews as well.

"This is a real emergency. We don't have a lot of time," he said. "Israel is a brand disaster to the outside world." ■

'Israel is not perceived as fun or normal. Our job is to say, "Yes, we are not normal, but we are far more normal than you think."'

Ido Aharoni

Media advisor, Foreign Ministry

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AIPAC: Both parties support Israel

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Congressional support for Israel will remain steadfast no matter which party wins next week's election, AIPAC said.

The unsolicited statement sent to media Wednesday by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee appeared to be in response to a barrage of recent Republican Jewish Coalition ads saying support for Israel has eroded among Democrats. "In recent weeks, some have suggested that it is better for Israel if one party or another is in control of the House or Senate," the

statement said. "AIPAC believes that strong bipartisan support for Israel exists in both parties and, regardless of who is in control, that support will remain steadfast.

AIPAC works closely with leaders on both sides of the aisle, each deeply committed to strengthening the bonds between the United States and Israel. No matter who wins the upcoming elections, AIPAC is confident that Congress will continue to support a strong Israel and a strong relationship between the United States and its most reliable ally in the Middle East." ■

Violence threatens Jerusalem gay parade

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Explosions. Blocked highways. Armed vigilantes on rooftops. Blood in the streets of the holy city.

The nightmarish scenarios raised by Israeli police ahead of next week's international gay pride parade in Jerusalem are reminiscent of the worst terrorist alerts.

The concern that religious groups could turn violent over WorldPride 2006 is so high that Israeli officials are hinting that the event, scheduled for Nov. 10, may not go ahead.

"The security alerts regarding the parade are real, and we plan to dedicate police forces to the capital as needed," Public Security Minister Avi Dichter said Wednesday. "But should this deployment mean that the security 'red lines' in the rest of the country are breached, then we will have to reassess."

In what Israeli media described as a "dress rehearsal" for what could happen during the planned parade, fervently Orthodox Jews rampaged in their Jerusalem neighborhood Tuesday night, torching garbage and throwing stones at police.

"The religious community is begging: Save Jerusalem from disgrace and catastrophe," read a sign borne by one protester. Another slogan: "Jerusalem won't become Sodom and Gomorrah."

Israelis are mindful that the threats of violence have a very real precedent. During a local gay pride parade last year, a fervently Orthodox Jew who called himself an emissary of God went on a stabbing spree, wounding three marchers. He was sentenced to 12 years in jail.

Now police are speaking of religious protesters who could storm road junctions to stop traffic, throw dangerous debris on marchers and even use firecrackers to simulate terrorist bombings that would confuse police.

There also have been nonviolent efforts to scuttle the parade, including public calls by a coalition of Jewish, Muslim and Christian clerics and a failed appeal to the High Court of Justice.

For members of Israel's gay community, the event is an opportunity to march for acceptance in their capital alongside, potentially, thousands of fellow activists from abroad.

"This is a struggle for the character of

Jerusalem and for the State of Israel," Saar Menanel, an openly gay city councilman, said. "We want to be tolerated for what we are. We are not going to flaunt our sexuality."

A liberal lawmaker, Ran Cohen of the Meretz Party, deplored Dichter's suggestion that the perceived threat level could warrant cancelling the march.

"It is incumbent upon the police to tackle those who would harm others for their beliefs," Cohen said.

But a former chief of Jerusalem

police, Arie Amit, appealed to the organizers of WorldPride 2006 to think about relocating. Gay pride parades and mixed "love parades" are regularly staged in Tel Aviv without incident.

"Just as no one would dream of holding such an event in the Vatican or in Mecca, so should the considerations be regarding Jerusalem," Amit said. "It is not worth the risk of serious injury, or worse, just because someone insists on holding this event in Jerusalem rather than anywhere else in Israel." ■

Army fights for animal residents

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — On several army bases in Israel, a touch of the wild can be found. Not far from young conscripts marching in dusty uniforms, kudu, eland antelopes, red deer, wild sheep and oryx graze in open areas.

Over the past 20 years these natural grazers, most of them from Africa, have been sent to Israeli army bases as part of a project aimed at restoring natural vegetation and reducing brush which in turn prevents wildfires.

The animals were initially sent to the bases by Israeli zoos and petting farms that no longer had room for them. Their presence eliminates brush without the need for herbicides, which could contaminate ground water and damage vegetation.

But the project, possibly the only one of its kind in Israel, may be in danger following a dispute between the army and the Ministry of Agriculture over the ministry's new guidelines, which call for some 1,000 animals to be vaccinated annually and given blood tests.

The ministry says the issue is about preventing disease and overpopulation.

"The outbreak of diseases among animals can create an emergency situation," ministry spokeswoman Dafna Yorista wrote in a statement.

Army officials argue that no animals on their bases have become ill and that vaccinating wild animals could be dangerous to their health.

"It goes against standard procedure in the rest of the world. It is not good for the animals. No one benefits from it," Maj. Ofir Cohen, head of the army's office in charge of grazing animals, said.

But Roni King, a veterinarian for the Israeli Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, said that while it is difficult to do the vaccinations, they do not pose a threat to the animals.

Rounding up the animals can be a challenge, King said. Such an operation in-

volves being able to tranquilize an animal, take blood samples and administer the immunizations or contraception.

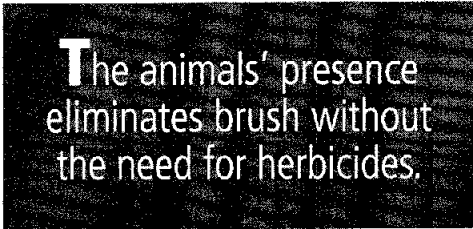
Roni Malka, head of the parks authority's law enforcement division, said that in recent years the animal population on the army bases has increased and may even outgrow the bases.

It is important regardless, he said, that the animals be vaccinated against illnesses such as hoof-and-mouth disease.

King said that the animals, because they are not native to Israel, should possibly not be on the bases at all.

The bases are not zoos, he said, where the animals' well-being can be supervised. If the bases want to control brush fire, they should take domesticated animals like sheep and goats to graze.

"For the welfare of the animals it is not right to just put them in the army camps — it is not the way to deal with animals because you cannot control them there," he said. ■



The animals' presence eliminates brush without the need for herbicides.

Israel support key in Florida district

By LARRY LUXNER

BOCA RATON, Fla. (JTA) — A recent candidates' forum in the heart of Florida's heavily Jewish 22nd Congressional District was supposed to pit longtime U.S. Rep. E. Clay Shaw Jr. (R) against Florida Sen. Ron Klein, a 49-year-old Democrat who wants Shaw's job badly.

But the confrontation at Boca Raton's Temple Beth El never took place: Shaw was a no-show.

Earlier in the day, Shaw didn't even come out to greet President Bush, who had flown to Florida on Air Force One to raise \$1 million for local GOP candidates.

In both cases, Shaw's office attributed the congressman's absence to "scheduling conflicts" — but Klein says it's clear his opponent is trying to distance himself from the increasingly unpopular president. Shaw couldn't be reached for comment.

"Over 90 percent of the time, Shaw votes with George W. Bush. I think that shows a lack of independence on many key issues, and this administration has made a lot of mistakes," Klein told JTA. "And now, a lot of people are not happy with Bush."

Florida's 22nd Congressional District covers 500 square miles of Palm Beach and Broward counties. It has the largest percentage of senior citizens of any district in the nation, not to mention many thousands of Jews.

The district came under intense scrutiny in the disputed 2000 presidential election, when "butterfly ballots" and "dimpled chads" made international news. The district narrowly voted for Al Gore in 2000, and 52 percent of the votes cast in 2004 went for John Kerry.

This time around, the district features one of America's most fiercely fought congressional races.

According to a poll published Oct. 21 by the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, Shaw leads Klein, 48 percent to 43 percent. With a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points, however, the race is a statistical dead heat two weeks before Election Day.

"The good news for us is that independent and undecided voters are breaking our way, particularly this year because they're really put out with what's been going on in Washington," Klein told JTA in a



Larry Luxner

Florida State Sen. Ron Klein, a Democrat, greets a Jewish voter following a candidates' forum on Oct. 24 at Temple Beth El in Boca Raton.

half-hour interview at Beth El. "Clay Shaw has been in office for 26 years. It's time for a change."

A Cleveland native and corporate lawyer, Klein is minority leader of the Florida Senate. He long has been active in Jewish circles — especially the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County — where he headed the Young Leadership Division and until recently was on the federation's board of directors.

Klein's wife, Dori, and their two children are involved in the campaign. In recent weeks the race has turned bitter, with Shaw and his backers accusing Klein of a conflict of interest and dishonesty in his law practice.

Sid Dinerstein, chairman of the Palm Beach County Republican Party and a member of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said Klein "got huge amounts of money" from trial lawyers across the country for his House campaign.

"Ron Klein is a public official who has been very successful at making himself wealthy," Dinerstein charged. "His firm is a lobbying organization. Ron Klein, his employees and his partners lobby other senators on behalf of their clients, and Klein makes \$1 million every two years from that."

Klein denies such accusations, insist-

ing his campaign has been "100 percent focused" on the issues and that he takes his ethics very seriously.

Among Klein's biggest supporters are Robert Wexler and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Jewish Democrats from Florida whose own U.S. House districts also contain large numbers of Jews.

"Shaw has been totally distorting and lying about Sen. Klein's record," said Wasserman Schultz, who represents Florida's 20th Congressional District.

"From the Jewish community's perspective. Sen. Klein has been a champion in his personal life for Israel, and has stood on the

floor of the Florida House and Senate and fought for the concerns the Jewish community cares about," she continued. "Shaw supports Israel too, but has not supported other issues that Jews care about, particularly affordable prescription drugs,

Social Security and a woman's right to choose."

Both Klein and Shaw are on record urging the Bush administration to relocate the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Klein, who estimated that up to 25 percent of the voters in his district are Jewish, recently returned from his sixth trip to Israel, where he met with leaders including Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

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The district came under intense scrutiny in the disputed 2000 presidential election, when 'butterfly ballots' and 'dimpled chads' made international news.

Partisan threat to Tel Aviv U. funding?

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An e-mail from a congressional Republican staffer that seems to threaten to cut off U.S. funds to Tel Aviv University unless its principal U.S. benefactor abandons a Democratic candidate is roiling a congressional race north of Chicago.

Democrats are calling on U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) to fire Caryn Garber, the staffer who sent the e-mail. Abner Mikva, a former congressman from the district, asked for a federal investigation.

Garber, Kirk's district representative in suburban Northbrook, wrote to Robert Schroyer, chairman of the Tel Aviv University American Council. In the e-mail sent from Garber's personal address and addressed to Sam Witkin, the council's president, Garber asks Witkin to urgently call her on a non-work line.

"Your new Chicago TAU 'chief,' none other than Bob Schroyer, is working overtime to defeat Mark Kirk," Garber wrote in the July 19 e-mail, first reported by the Chicago Sun-Times last Friday and obtained by JTA. "The community is not pleased with his out front actions and it was suggested to me by someone who should know that Itamar should call Bob and tell him that his actions can have a very bad effect on the university."

The reference is to Itamar Rabinovich, a former Israeli ambassador to Washington who now is president of Tel Aviv University.

"Bob Schroyer calls himself pro-Israel?" the e-mail continues. "Hard to believe that he can make the claim while working to defeat the MOST pro-Israel voice on the Hill ... Mark Kirk. We understand that Schroyer hates Bush...that has NOTHING to do with Mark Steven Kirk. Revenge is a dish best served cold. I know that you and Itamar would not want TAU to be sullied by his out of control actions."

The TAU American Council did not return a call for comment.

Kirk is in a tight race with Dan Seals, a marketing executive, in a district that leaned Democrat in the 2000 and 2004 presidential races and that has a substantial Jewish community.

Kirk's membership on the foreign operations subcommittee of the U.S. House of

Representatives Appropriations Committee means he influences the disbursement of about \$25 million distributed annually through the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad Act.

Witkin said that his TAU council obtained \$1 million through the act over the last three years to purchase U.S.-made equipment for the university's Center for Middle Eastern Genetic Diseases. His office was now preparing to apply for funds for AIDS research.

However, Witkin suggested that neither he nor Schroyer took the threat seriously; the subcommittee generally unanimously approved the funding. "They have always looked at foreign aid in a totally bipartisan fashion," he said.

Additionally, losing the funds was unlikely to seriously damage the university, although Witkin emphasized that Tel Aviv University appreciated the money.

"The fact that the U.S. government deemed our project worthy of granting an award, we're very proud of the fact," he said.

One measure of how little regard Witkin had for the threat was that he did not contact Rabinovich, as requested by Garber.

"It was not something I was going to do," he told JTA.

Schroyer said he alerted Kirk to the threat, and Kirk wrote back, asking for a copy of the e-mail. Schroyer complied, but since then, he did not hear from Kirk until the story broke last week, although he says he wrote Kirk five times asking for a follow-up.

Schroyer wants Garber fired. "I believe it might be illegal - it is unethical," he told JTA. "He should have dismissed her immediately and he should have written a letter of apology, not just to me, but publicly," he said.

He took the threat seriously. "He is a high-ranking member of the committee, and the e-mail certainly suggests he has the authority" to influence whether or not Tel Aviv University receives disbursements.

Kirk is one of Israel's most outspoken supporters in Congress, leading efforts to purge what he believes are anti-Israel elements operating under the aegis of the



Robert Schroyer, chairman of the Tel Aviv University American Council.

U.N. Relief and Works Agency, the body that administers assistance to Palestinian refugees.

Schroyer's support for Seals is especially stinging for Kirk. Until now, Schroyer, an insurance magnate and former national chairman of the UJA-Federation Campaign for the United Jewish Communities, had backed Kirk.

Kirk reprimanded Garber when the e-mail's contents were revealed last week. Seals called a press conference Tuesday

in which he called on Kirk to fire Garber.

"At the end of the day, this is intimidation," Seals told JTA in a phone interview. "Why is she still being paid by taxpayer dollars?"

He was backed by the National Jewish Democratic Council.

"Congressman Kirk never fired the staffer!" the NJDC wrote in an e-mail to supporters. "She continues to collect her paycheck at taxpayers' expense."

Kirk's office did not return a request for comment, but earlier he told Roll Call, a Capitol Hill newspaper, that he was "very upset when I became aware of the e-mail and its sentiment. That does not reflect my view. I reprimanded Ms. Garber and told her that if anything like this happened again, she would be dismissed."

Kirk said he had sent Schroyer a letter of apology.

AIPAC refused to comment on the matter, though Garber is a former staffer for the pro-Israel lobby.

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Kirk is one of Israel's
most outspoken
supporters in Congress.

Postwar haven hosts reunion

By TOBY AXELROD

BLANKENESE, Germany (JTA) — The footsteps on the stairs are soft, but Dora Love has good ears. She opens her door a crack.

"Are you lost? Can I help you?" she asks in elegant German.

A petite woman of 83, clad in demure pajamas, she steps into the hall of the Elsa-Braendstroem-Haus in Blankenese, Germany, and right into her role of 60 years ago.

"Take a glass of tea and some cake up with you," says Love, nee Rabinowitz, who in 1946 worked at a home for young Holocaust survivors, in this very house, as an administrator for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

She has not been here since then. A survivor herself, Love married and made a new life as a linguist in Colchester, England. Most of the nearly 400 children, primarily orphans, who stayed here moved on to modern Israel.

Love and 46 former residents revisited the home Oct. 4-11.

"It was the first place for a 'normal life,'" said Bracha Ghilai, who was liberated from Bergen-Belsen and had lost her family.

"I had no education, no clothes," said Mordecai Popper, who came here in 1947 when he was 12, while his widowed mother waited at a Displaced Persons camp for permission to emigrate to Israel. "Here we had enough to eat because of the Joint and the UNRRA," the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

"It was the first place where I had a childhood," said Yossi Erez, who today works for the JDC in Warsaw, assisting in "the revival of the Jewish community of Poland."

He and his mother were the only survivors from an extended family of 102 people from Lodz, Poland.

In Blankenese, "for the first time I have somebody feeling warm towards me," Erez said. "I'm not hungry, I feel safe, I don't have to worry what will happen tomorrow and I feel that I have some future. It was the beginning of my childhood, at the age of 9."

The reunion was organized by Martin Schmidt, a retired classics scholar who three years ago co-founded an association to research the history of Jews in Blankenese.

"My parents raised us so that we knew

that Hitler was a criminal," said Schmidt, who is not Jewish, "and when the Americans came to our village on April 24, 1945, we knew that we were freed — not conquered."

But in Blankenese, there appeared to be little awareness of history, even decades later.

"There was a general opinion that nothing had happened, and that there were only two or three Jews," said Schmidt, 72, a former member of the Hamburg Parliament's Green Party. "We discovered that there were many Jews. We found 150 names, and of those more than 20 were killed. Now people know about this in Blankenese."

In 2004 the association prepared an exhibition on the Nazi period. They came across the story of the children's home and decided to try to find former residents and invite them to visit.

The Elsa-Braendstroem-Haus on the former Warburg estate agreed to host the guests, and private citizens covered the costs of travel, food and lodging — about \$60,000 in all.

The association also received assistance from the Remembrance and Future Fund, established by the German government and industry in 2000.

The first gathering, held last year, was attended by 37 former residents and about 15 family members. This time 47 former Blankenese children, with 12 family members, came back to visit.

The recent reunion included trips to local public schools, where some visitors spoke with teens. For many, the visit was a chance to reconnect with the first new friends they made after the war.

The Nazis used the Warburg estate during the war as a military hospital. After the British Army returned the property to the family, Max Warburg's son, Eric, "told the Joint he would like to have the house used for child survivors," said Sara Kadosh, who heads the organization's archive in Israel.

The home was opened in early 1946. Staff included soldiers from the Jewish Brigades and appointees of the JDC, which also provided food, medication and books.

The children began to learn Hebrew and other subjects and to play outdoors.

"It took some time, but they caught up," Love recalled.

The Jewish Agency for Israel — and the few surviving parents — wanted the children to come to Israel, but the British distributed only a few hundred immigration certificates per month. In Germany's British zone, authorities "agreed to get certificates for children," Kadosh said — part of the attraction of the Blankenese home.

The first group of children arrived in Blankenese from the DP camp at Bergen Belsen. After four months, they received certificates to go to Palestine.

A second group followed in a similar pattern. The third group "was smuggled into the British zone" and left Blankenese in 1948, shortly before the Jewish state was declared.

After the last group left, the Joint continued to use the Warburg property as a home for children until 1949.

"There were not enough children any more," Kadosh said.

Love had lost her mother, sister and brother in the camps. A half-year after she was liberated from Stutthof, she learned that her father was looking for her "all over the world." They were reunited in Italy in 1946.

Love soon returned to Germany, where she worked for the UNRRA. One day a knock came on her door.

"We are looking for Miss Love."

"You are speaking to her."

"We need you in the Joint."

What were they talking about?

"You speak all these weird languages," they said. Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew and German — all were needed at the home in Blankenese.

In the concentration camps, "German officers would piss on you and then say that Jews stink," Love said. Then, in Blankenese, "There were gardens. And houses. The children were allowed to play, to run around."

Love signed on for three months. In the end she stayed for three years, until the home was closed.

'It was the first place where I had a childhood.'

Yossi Erez

Postwar Blankenese resident

Kushner ventures into fiction

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Some things that happen are not true, and some true things never happened.

That's how Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS

- Lori Sagarin was elected president of the National Association of Temple Educators.
- Rabbi Shena Potter was appointed regional director of admissions and recruitment at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati.
- Glen Lewy was named national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League.
- Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson was named chairwoman of the board for the Hadassah Foundation.
- Rivka Yudin was named director of the Orthodox Union's Michlelet program.
- Skip Vichness was named chairman of the board of the Foundation for Jewish Camping.
- David Berkman was named director of the Reform movement's Camp Kalsman.
- Yair Shiran was named Israel economic minister to North America.
- Rabbi Gary Greenbaum was named the American Jewish Committee's U.S. director of interreligious affairs.
- Steven Windmueller was appointed dean of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles.

HONORS

- The Anti-Defamation League honored U.S. diplomat Hiram Bingham IV posthumously for his defying orders to grant American visas to European Jews and other refugees during the Holocaust.
- Businessman Bernard Marcus was honored by the Anti-Defamation League for his philanthropy.
- MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger honored Edie Mesick, executive director of the Nutrition Consortium of New York State for her work in the fight against hunger.
- Former German Interior Minister Otto Schily was honored by the Anti-Defamation League for his work against anti-Semitism and terrorism.
- The National Jewish Democratic Committee honored Bernard Rapoport, Ambassador Arthur Schechter and David Steiner with lifetime achievement awards at a Washington event.
- Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies gave Woman of Valor awards to Bonnie Fuller, Elise Kalles, Pauline Menkes and Carol Grafstein.

recalls a teaching he heard from Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel.

And it fits Kushner's newest book, which is a book about a book, based on a real book the author found many years ago in Safed, Israel, city of mystics.

Like Wiesel, Kushner has spent a lifetime delving into the Jewish mystical tradition. Unlike Wiesel, the San Francisco-based Reform rabbi has done most of his teaching from a podium and through non-fiction writing.

Now, after 15 books on Jewish spirituality, 28 years as a pulpit rabbi in Massachusetts and a stint teaching spirituality and mysticism at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, Kushner has issued his first novel, "Kabbalah: A Love Story," published by Morgan Road Books, an imprint of Random House.

It's a short book that, on its surface, entwines two love stories: the first is of Moshe ben Shem-Tov, a late-18th-century Spanish scholar, and his brilliant-but married-female student; the second is the romance of a modern-day New York Reform rabbi and his astronomer lover.

The stories are tied together by the Zohar, Judaism's central book of mysticism. Ostensibly written by the second-century mystic Shimon Bar Yohai, it most probably was composed by Ben Shem Tov, who attributed it to the earlier sage to give it more prestige.

In Kushner's novel, the present-day rabbi finds a 17th-century copy of the mystical tome and spends much of the ensuing narrative learning its lessons.

The novel is based on a real incident.

Sitting in his home on San Francisco's Russian Hill, Kushner carefully handles another book. It's an 18th-century Zohar, old and fragile, its creamy pages crackling with age, its cover a worn-out yellowish-brown that is peeling back from the edges.

"Go ahead, touch the page," he urges. "Feel the letters."

Kushner found the book in Safed while leading a congregational trip to Israel in 1975. He spent an afternoon wandering the streets asking passers-by, in his rudimentary Hebrew, where he might find some antique books.

He entered an old synagogue to rest,

and asked the same question of the shul's caretaker.

The caretaker went to a pile of rubbish lying in a corner, rummaged through the heap, picked up an old book, dusted it off and handed it to Kushner. The American flipped through a few pages and saw it was a Zohar printed in 1791 by the famed Livorno press.

Not wanting to take so valuable an item, he tried to hand it back, but the Israeli urged him to keep it.

"It's yours," the man's gestures indicated.

Five years ago, Kushner returned to Safed to find the synagogue. He spent a full day hunting, but no one, including the city tourism office, could help him. The next morning, his companion tripped over a

dog lying in the street, and the dog's owner recognized the shul from some photographs Kushner had taken on his first visit.

"It's right over there," the man said, pointing down the block.

The book and its unusual provenance became the perfect foil for Kushner's first foray into fiction.

"Fiction is another way for me to teach," he says, citing midrashic literature and the stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer as his main influences.

Like midrash, and most of Singer's writing, Kushner's book is more fable than novel. Rather than characters driving the narrative, it and they are instruments the author uses to elucidate his Kabbalistic lessons.

If he had to put a name to it, Kushner would call the genre "spiritual fiction," but he's not bothered with where it belongs on the bookshelf. The story gently, and somewhat obliquely, moves the reader through the kabbalistic process of, as Kushner describes it, "using the sacred tradition to comprehend the inner workings of the divine."

It does that through the two love stories — for love, which Kushner says demands "the dissolution of the self," parallels the Kabbalah's understanding of God as encompassing all reality, including the self.

All very high-falutin' ideas. But the book itself is simple, easily read in one evening. Like a fable. Or a sermon.

The stories are tied together by the Zohar.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Chief rabbi cancels Agunah conference

Israel's Sephardi chief rabbi seemed set to cancel a conference on agunot, or women who can not obtain Jewish divorce papers from their husbands.

Less than a week before the conference of renowned rabbis and heads of Jewish courts from across the world was set to convene in Jerusalem, a fax was sent to the 27 rabbis who had agreed to attend, notifying them that it would be canceled.

The Hebrew note obtained by JTA, signed by Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Dahan, head of Israel's rabbinical court system, said that Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar had canceled the Nov. 7-8 meeting "due to petitions that came to him both from Israel and outside of Israel."

However, Amar's office later hinted that the decision might not be final and that an official announcement would come only next week.

"It is clear that the ultra-Orthodox leaders in Israel have been pressuring him and it was too much to bear," Sharon Shenhav of the International Council of Jewish Women, who worked closely with Amar over the past two years to plan the conference, told JTA.

"Shamefully at the last minute he has canceled."

Seven Palestinians killed

Seven Palestinians were killed in continued Israeli military operations in the northern Gaza Strip. Three of the fatalities were civilians, two were members of the Popular Resistance Committees and two were members of a rocket squad that had been attacking Israel.

Thirty-five others were injured in clashes between IDF troops and Palestinian gunmen in Beit Hanoun.

Hundreds of militants were arrested during the raid, Palestinian sources said. Meanwhile, six Kassam rockets landed in Sderot, wounding three Israelis.

Synagogue vandalism amid gay protests

Suspected gay-rights activists vandalized a Tel Aviv synagogue. Vandals smashed windows in the early morning attack on the Geulot Yisrael synagogue and scrawled on a wall, "If we can't march in Jerusalem, you won't walk around in Tel Aviv."

The graffiti referred to fervently Orthodox Jews' push to cancel the WorldPride 2006 gay pride parade scheduled for Jerusalem next Friday. A gay member of Tel Aviv's city council condemned the vandalism, and police said they were investigating.

Israeli troops learn from Lebanon

Israeli troops fighting in the Gaza Strip learned lessons from the Lebanon war, a senior Israeli lawmaker said.

Tzachi Hanegbi, head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said Thursday that the planners of this week's operation against Palestinian rocket crews in the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun made efforts to avoid sustaining casualties on the scale of the recent campaign against Hezbollah.

"The commanders who went into Beit Hanoun learned the lessons of the Lebanon war," Hanegbi told Army Radio.

"Soldiers will not be sent" on missions "without training and preparation, nor without certainty that there are set plans which will identify which house, tunnel or site they want to reach."

Israel believes that Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza are trying to adopt Hezbollah tactics, which proved surprisingly effective against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

Central banker worried by scandals

The governor of the Bank of Israel said foreign investors might be scared off by the abundance of financial scandals in the Jewish

state. Stanley Fischer was quoted as saying in an interview Thursday that criminal investigations of alleged wrongdoing by Israeli public figures such as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Moshe Katsav, and rumors of other probes, sent the wrong message to foreign financial markets. "We have to calm down," he told the religious weekly BAKEHILA.

"Nobody wants to invest in a country where there is such hysteria."

NORTH AMERICA

William Styron dies at 81

Pulitzer Prize-winning author William Styron died at age 81.

The author of "The Confessions of Nat Turner" and "Sophie's Choice" succumbed to pneumonia after a long illness.

The novels by the white, Protestant Southerner often dealt controversially with the experiences of persecuted minorities.

Some criticized "Nat Turner," which covered a bold, ill-fated slave revolt in the American South, as a misunderstanding of the black experience, and even called it racist. "Sophie's Choice," which depicted a post-Holocaust romance between a Polish, non-Jewish survivor and an American Jewish writer in Brooklyn, also had its critics, who said that Styron could not empathize with Holocaust victims.

In 2002, however, the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation honored Styron with its Witness to Justice Award, of which the author said to The Associated Press, "It is a kind of solid validation for me of what I tried to do as a novelist."

The author was also a liberal activist, whose work included advocating for Jews in the former Soviet Union.

WORLD

German publisher honored by Jewish community

Germany's Jewish community honored a publisher whose father profited from the disenfranchisement of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Hubert Burda, 66, head of the Munich-based Hubert Burda Media firm, received the Leo Baeck Prize in recognition of his efforts to repair the wrongs committed by the preceding generation.

Burda's father, who joined the Nazi party in 1938, acquired one of Germany's most modern and largest printing presses from the firm of Berthold, Ludwig and Karl Reiss, who were forced under the Nazis to sell at a tremendous loss.

Charlotte Knobloch, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, gave the prize to Burda in a ceremony Thursday.

Burda, who took over his father's publishing business in 1966, has been active in building connections between Jews and non-Jews in Germany, promoting close ties with Israel and supporting the revival of Jewish life in his home city of Munich.

He made major contributions toward a Center for Innovative Communication at Israel's Ben-Gurion University and to the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

He also gave some \$1.3 million toward Munich's new Jewish community center.

Jewish scouts represented

An organization was launched to represent Jews in the worldwide scouting movement. The International Forum of Jewish Scouts, launched Thursday in Jerusalem, will represent Jewish scouts at international gatherings alongside Catholic and Muslim scouts.

There are 80,000 to 100,000 Jewish scouts in the world, the vast majority — about 60,000 — in Israel.

There are some 15,000 Jewish scouts in the United States and 4,000 in France.