

IN THE NEWS
Suicide bomber wounds soldier

A Palestinian suicide bomber detonated herself in Gaza, wounding an Israeli soldier.

The attack took place Monday in Beit Hanoun, where Israeli troops have been operating for six days in an attempt to stop cross-border rocket salvos. Islamic Jihad took responsibility for the attack by the 18-year-old student, which Palestinian news sources said wounded many Palestinian civilians as well.

Report: Israel readies for renewed war

Israel reportedly is preparing for the possibility of another war with Hezbollah, this time joined by Syria. Citing assessments among top military brass, Ha'aretz reported Monday that Israeli forces are on alert for a fresh fight initiated by the Lebanese militia and its Syrian patrons in the summer of 2007.

According to the report, Hezbollah is believed to have come out of its recent war with Israel with more than 5,000 ground-to-ground missiles intact. Military officials declined comment.

Palestinians tap new PM?

The Palestinian Authority prime minister reportedly has chosen a potential replacement in a national unity government.

Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas leader, said Monday that the unnamed candidate could take over if he and P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah come to an agreement on a national unity government. The possibility of a new government was made necessary in part by financial pressures, including the Hamas government's inability to meet its payroll, as a result of a Western aid cutoff since the terrorist group took power in March.

A resumption of funding is contingent on any new P.A. government renouncing terrorism and acknowledging Israel's right to exist.

WORLD REPORT

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New field of synagogue studies addresses changes in Jewish life

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — When Westchester Reform Temple breaks ground on its new sanctuary and lifelong Jewish-learning center next spring, the 1,200-member congregation will be making some interesting changes.

The bimah, or dais, no longer will be front and center above the worshippers but will be lowered and in their midst, to emphasize that the praying going on at the front of the room is no more important than that taking place among the congregation.

There will be space for musicians to gather, rather than the current space that holds only a lone organist. There will be room for people to move and dance during services.

The old sanctuary was built after World War II, says Rabbi Rick Jacobs, and its traditional design reflected a notion of synagogue hierarchy and decorum that no longer is in favor. Instead, he says, the new building will create a space that brings people together, "to create and cement sacred space."

A redesign committee has been working with the help of leading experts in the field, but Jacobs says they could have used even more guidance in thinking about how the design could reflect the congregation's needs and priorities.

That's what a new institute is trying to promote: the creation of a field called synagogue studies, which would encourage practical-oriented research into how synagogues function and how they can be improved.

"I only wish it existed five years ago," Jacobs says.

The S3K Synagogue Studies Institute was launched Nov. 3 by Synagogue 3000, a national organization devoted to synagogue transformation through innovative leadership. The institute has an advisory board made up of the heads of all the major, and several smaller, rabbinical seminaries and of synagogue-transformation organizations,

foundation representatives and major figures in the field of non-Jewish congregational studies.

It also includes a virtual academy boasting more than three dozen scholars in Jewish studies at various academic institutions, who

will be encouraged to generate research that congregations can use.

Experts say the undertaking is overdue, with synagogue membership declining in many areas of the country and as several national initiatives have emerged to re-energize synagogue programming and worship.

There already is a field called congregational studies, which emerged as a discipline in universities and Christian seminaries in the early 1980s. It focuses on how congregations — churches, mosques, ashrams or synagogues — function as religious and social centers in contemporary society. The discipline addresses questions such as, how do leaders interact with congregants? How is the community's sacred space organized to enhance prayer? And how do congregations interact with each other?

Many Jewish scholars work in the field, and most of them study synagogues, but they must work across disciplines. There are no faculty positions in synagogue studies as such, which discourages research that

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ There are several initiatives trying to re-energize synagogue programming and worship

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could help synagogues function more effectively.

In addition, the field of congregational studies “uses categories that are Protestant categories,” says Shawn Landres, research director for Synagogue 3000, and that may not translate well into areas of concern for synagogues.

Jonathan Sarna, professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, concurs. He supports scholarship on synagogues within the general field of congregational studies, but says a discrete field that looks at the particular needs and concerns of Jewish religious organization also would be beneficial.

“A study of Willow Creek, a mega-church, is helpful in some ways, but it is not the model for most of our American synagogues,” he says. “There’s an enormous number of data regarding the histories of individual synagogues, but very few people are reading them, evaluating them, seeing what could be gleaned that would be of benefit to all synagogues.”

■ Synagogue 3000 will “act as a catalyst” to generate interest in creating the new field, Landres says. The institute has identified key scholars and will convene them periodically — helping them network and find funding for their projects — and will act as a virtual university-without-walls to promote the growth of the discipline.

The research will be conducted with an eye to practical application. Rabbis, Jewish educators and other practitioners will have critical input.

“The goal is to create the field and produce research that can be used,” Landres says. “And it will be academically sound.”

For example, when a working group meets in December in Los Angeles to hammer out the parameters for the proposed new field, pulpit rabbis as well as academics will be part of the discussion, Landres points out, to ensure that research projects and curricula are aimed at producing work that real congregations can use.

“We’ll have rabbis in the room saying, ‘I need this, can you guys go study it?’ ”

One of the institute’s first projects will be a study of synagogue space by David Kaufman, a specialist in synagogue architecture teaching at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. He will focus on how new building projects

can work to enhance synagogue life — how, say, making the study hall rather than the sanctuary or auditorium the center of a building can demonstrate a synagogue’s commitment to Jewish education.

Kaufman will use this research as the basis for a book that congregational leaders can use in framing their priorities in future building plans.

■ None of the rabbinical seminaries currently teaches synagogue studies, though pieces of the discipline such as leadership development and theories of congregational organization sometimes are taught as electives.

Norman Cohen, provost of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, confirms that Reform rabbinical seminaries offer elective courses in topics such as leadership development that could be part of a future field of synagogue studies, but adds that these have “always been pieces, fragmentary, not systematic.” Other movement’s seminaries “suffer from the same thing,” he says.

This year the Reform rabbinical training program will begin to integrate leadership preparation into its coursework, Cohen says, starting with first-year students in Jerusalem. The required course

will look at issues such as, “What is the nature of the institution they will be serving, how it is changing, what skills do the students need?” Cohen says.

Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Conservative Movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary and a prominent scholar of American Jewish institutional life, applauds the Synagogue 3000 initiative.

“While there are differences between the denominations, we continue to learn from each other,” Wertheimer says, noting that scholars and institutional leaders from many Jewish streams will be working together on the advisory board and in the virtual academy.

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, says practical research like that promoted by the

new institute will provide a framework for institutional self-reflection, helping a shul do strategic planning to “determine what are its primary and secondary goals, its strengths and how to play to them.”

■ American Jewish life is centered in synagogues, he says, and “a lot of our Jewish future is invested in the survival and flourishing of synagogues.”

Nancy Ammerman, professor of the sociology of religion at Boston University and one of the best-known names in congregational studies, speculates that Jewish seminaries didn’t jump on board as quickly as Christian ones because rabbinical education focuses so strongly on text-based study.

Christian theological education had the same focus until two decades ago, she says, when “the recognition emerged that pastors were going into work located in a human community, and no matter how well they knew their text and tradition, they might not be able to sustain that community in which the teaching takes place.”

Still, she points out, the field is quite new, so the development of a separate field of synagogue studies “is not that far behind” — and she expects to see it emerge within the decade. ■

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Jonathan Sarna
Brandeis University



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Gaza students lament West Bank cutoff

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — There is just one trained occupational therapist working in the Gaza Strip and 24,000 disabled residents in need of his help.

Shayma el-Naji, 21, who grew up in Gaza, decided she would become an occupational therapist and help fill the void. But with no degree program in Gaza, she applied to study at Bethlehem University in the West Bank.

Four years after starting her studies there, she has yet to set foot on campus. She and the nine other occupational therapy students from Gaza have been forbidden by Israeli authorities to travel to the West Bank as part of a general ban on Palestinian students traveling between the two areas that was imposed soon after the violent Palestinian intifada began in September 2000.

Instead, they study from afar, attending lectures via video conference and Internet discussions. But none of the practical side of their studies — a major portion of a hands-on profession like occupational therapy — can be done in Gaza because there's no one to supervise their work there.

The students have traveled briefly to Cairo for practical instruction, but with the border to Egypt now usually closed by Israel for security reasons, even that option may not be tenable.

"We're disappointed because we are not threatening anyone's security," el-Naji told JTA in a phone interview from Gaza. "We're looking to complete our studies and start work helping people."

Most Palestinian universities and colleges are located in the West Bank, not the Gaza Strip. Degrees in some medical fields, including occupational therapy, are only available in the West Bank.

Relating to questions about the 10 students, Shlomo Dror, a spokesman for the Israeli military department that coordinates policy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, said the reasons are exclusively security-related, part of a policy to prevent potential terrorists from Gaza from entering the West Bank.

Dror said there have been incidents of Gazans who relocated to the West Bank and then helped plan terrorist attacks in Israel or perpetrated them themselves. Part of the debate when it comes to

granting student permits, he said, is whether Israel can handle the possible threats or needs to continue its blanket ban.

But the students' lawyers, who have brought the case to the Israeli Supreme Court, argue that the ban is a case of collective punishment and an attempt to label all Gazans as dangerous.

"It's a dehumanization of Gaza residents that is not helpful to Israelis or Palestinians. The policy is also not coherent because they are preventing Palestinians from studying at Palestinian universities, and particularly these 10 students are asking to study a profession that would be extremely helpful for Gaza residents," said Sari Bashi, director of Gisha, an Israeli group that advocates for Palestinians and is representing the students. "What could be objectionable about that, especially when these students are not known to be a security threat?"

Gisha lawyers argued in the Oct. 31 court hearing that the students be reviewed on a case-by-case basis before being banned from traveling to the West Bank for security reasons.

On Nov. 2, the Supreme Court ordered the Israeli army to specify why it refuses to allow students from Gaza to study at West Bank universities. The decision suggests that the justices were not convinced by the state's argument that all students from Gaza are potentially dangerous.

Some 250 Israeli academics have submitted a petition to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz demanding that Gaza students who have passed individual security checks be allowed to study at colleges and universities in the West Bank.

Education Minister Yuli Tamir has joined the call to end the blanket ban, just as she has called for an end to a similar ban preventing Palestinian students from studying at Israeli universities.

Hanan Reicher, the state prosecutor, argued in the most recent Supreme Court hearing that the state cannot

conduct individual security checks on students because of the difficulties involved in collecting intelligence information on Gazans. Reicher also told the court that young residents of Gaza between ages 16 to 35 were especially known for attempting to harm Israeli security.

Earlier this year, the state wrote in its original response to the Gisha appeal that students pose a special risk since — even if they don't arrive in the West Bank with the intention of taking part in terrorist activities — they may be recruited by militant elements once there.

Restriction of Palestinians' freedom

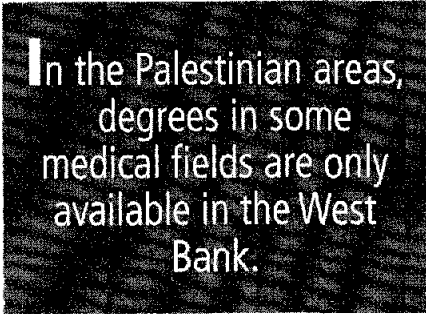
of movement has increased in recent years as the security situation has deteriorated. Human rights activists and Palestinians complain that if Palestinians are to build national institutions and the beginnings

of a state, they need to be able to travel to both parts of their future state.

But Israeli military officials say Israel's cannot allow the violence prevalent in Gaza today into the West Bank. Limiting the number of Palestinians who can travel between the two areas — and who would have to cross Israel to do so — is part of that strategy.

The number of disabled people in Gaza is considered disproportionately high in part because of a lack of safety codes, which leads to increased accidents, as well as Israeli counterterrorist operations, which sometimes injure civilians as well.

"In the long term Israel should be trying to make peace with educated, well-cared-for people, and all these students are trying to do is to get an education and learn the skills they need to help rehabilitate people with disabilities in Gaza," Bashi said. "It is in Israel's interest to allow Palestinian young people to become educated and to learn the skills they need to build a robust civil society, and particularly to learn medical professions that will help them care for fellow Palestinians that need their help."



In the Palestinian areas, degrees in some medical fields are only available in the West Bank.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Ethiopian-Israelis protest blood disposal

Up to 11 people were hurt in a protest by Ethiopian-Israelis in Jerusalem.

The demonstrators were responding Monday to a Channel 2 news report last week that the Health Ministry revived its policy of throwing away blood donated by Ethiopian-Israelis, for fear of disease. Some 200 people gathered in front of the government compound in Jerusalem, while others blocked the entrance to the city. Four policemen were among the injured.

The Associated Press quoted a Health Ministry spokeswoman, Inbal Jacobs, as saying that Israel was following international standards, which require potential donors to fill out questionnaires that block people from donating if they were in countries where any blood-borne disease is endemic.

Jacobs pointed out that the group not only includes people who have been to Ethiopia, where AIDS is widespread, but also people who spent time in Britain during the Mad Cow disease outbreak. A similar issue arose in Israel around a decade ago, at which time the ministry said it would stop the practice.

Protesters cited other unfulfilled government promises, such as affirmative action, equal pay for Ethiopian religious leaders and expediting the Falash Mura aliyah.

Jerusalem gay parade gets go-ahead

Israel's attorney-general turned down a request by Jerusalem police to call off this week's Jerusalem gay pride parade.

Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz ruled Sunday that the parade, which has drawn threats of violence from fervently Orthodox protesters, could go ahead Friday, but he ordered organizers to confer with police on changing the route so as to reduce friction with Jerusalem's religious communities.

Dozens of fervently Orthodox Jews in Mea She'arim rioted at the news that the parade was to proceed.

Police said Monday that 12,000 police and border police would be called in to protect the marchers.

10 arrested as Orthodox protest gay march

Ten fervently Orthodox protesters were arrested as violent demonstrations continued in Israel against an upcoming gay pride parade.

The protests, which began last week in fervently Orthodox neighborhoods of Jerusalem, continued Monday and spread to other parts of the city and its outskirts. Rioters blocked roads by placing tires and trash receptacles in thoroughfares and lighting them on fire.

A cab driver was hurt Monday when one of the burning canisters rolled into his vehicle.

Hundreds of police were deployed to stem the violence. Israel's Chief Rabbinate on Monday called homosexuals an "abominated minority" and "the lowest of people," and called on Israelis to "gather the old and the young and bitterly protest the terrible abomination which is desecrating Israel and her people.

"And of course, appropriately, without violence or harm to property."

Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar said the statement did not encourage or fuel the violent demonstrations taking place.

The gay pride parade is scheduled to take place in Jerusalem on Friday.

Syria upbeat on peace

Syria's foreign minister predicted that efforts to achieve a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace will resume next year. "We hope to

have in 2007 a peace process to settle the issue," Walid Moualem said Monday, adding that his country "appreciates" debates in Israel on whether to return the Golan Heights to Damascus' control under a future accord.

Moualem brushed off assessments in Jerusalem that there could soon be another Israeli war with Syria, perhaps as part of an escalated conflict involving Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon.

"If the Israelis are thinking of launching a war next year, this is not the way.

"They need to understand that using force does not solve issues," he said. Israel has publicly brushed off recent peace overtures from Syria, saying it should first end its support for Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups.

Technion boosts graduate school

A \$30 million grant from the founder of QUALCOMM will allow the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology to expand its graduate programs. Irwin and Joan Jacobs of San Diego announced recently at the American Technion Society's annual meeting that they would make the donation to the Haifa school.

The philanthropists previously had established a research center at the Technion for communication and information technologies.

QUALCOMM established operations near the Technion campus in 1993 and has hired many Technion graduates.

WORLD

Zuroff: Send Holocaust criminals to trial

The head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Serbian authorities to extradite suspected Holocaust war criminals. Efraim Zuroff made the remarks Sunday in a meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic in Jerusalem.

He named Sandor Kepiro, who was convicted for his role in the murder of more than 1,000 people in Novi Sad in 1942 when he was a Hungarian officer, and now lives in Budapest; Milijov Asner, who as police chief of Pozega helped send hundreds of Serbs, Jews and Roma (gypsies) to their deaths in Ustashe camps, and now lives in Klagenfurt, Austria; and Ivo Rojnica, who as governor of Dubrovnik was an accomplice to the persecution and deaths of hundreds of Serbs, Jews and Roma and now lives in Buenos Aires.

Zuroff urged Draskovic and his government to expedite the extradition of the three to Belgrade for trial.

Rome hosts Jewish film festival

An Israeli- and Jewish-themed film festival is under way this week in Rome. Called the Roma Kolno'a Festival, it focuses on four themes: contemporary Israeli film, the spy story in Israel- and Jewish-themed films, the influence of the Holocaust on the films of survivor and filmmaker Roman Polanski, and a homage to Israeli filmmaker Uri Zohar.

The six-day event opened Saturday night with the 2004 Israeli film "Metallic Blues," introduced by director Danny Verete.

NORTH AMERICA

Kosher site launched for N.Y.

A new Web site was launched for kosher restaurants in New York City.

One can search by location or cuisine on <http://kosher-ny.com>, which also provides the source of kosher certification.

KosherNY also provides information text messaging through phone or e-mail: Those in search of a restaurant can text their location to eat@kosher-ny.com and will receive information on the four closest kosher establishments.