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Advocates Protest Targeting Ethiopian Youth for West Bank Evangelical Bible Program

In wake of Haaretz report, Association of Ethiopian Jews urges Education Minister Bennett to end his ministry's support for the program

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An activity at the National Leadership Center with the settlement of Ariel in the background, August, 2015. Credit: Oksana Art

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An organization that advocates for Ethiopian Jews in Israel has responded with outrage to a report that the Education Ministry plans to enroll thousands of Ethiopian teens in a Bible-based leadership training program, developed by evangelical Christians, in the West Bank settlement of Ariel.



teachings and with field activities such as obstacle courses.

The evangelical group that built the center was concerned that young Jews in Israel, especially Ethiopians, have become disconnected from their faith.

"If it is true that the Education Ministry is cooperating with evangelicals in spiritual and religious programming designated for students of Ethiopian descent, that is extremely serious," wrote Ziva Mekonen-Degu, the executive director of the Association of Ethiopian Jews, in a letter sent Wednesday to Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Education Ministry Director-General Shmuel Abuhav.

to convene an urgent hearing on the matter.



Naftali Bennett, Israel's Minister of Education. A good friend and amazing leader for Israel! He has a heart for G-d, and for developing programs based on biblical values for Israeli society. We love Naftali!

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Spread out over 130 acres of land, including six obstacle courses, the National Leadership Center was opened in 2010 and is run by a company affiliated with the Ariel municipality. According to its



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The driving force behind the initiative is Heather Johnston, the founder and executive director of the U.S. Israel Education Association, an American lobbying organization that supports the settlement movement and opposes the idea of an independent Palestinian state. The organization brings Congressional delegations on trips to the West Bank to meet with leaders of the settlement movement in the hopes of influencing U.S. State Department policy.

Johnston and her husband Bruce, a pastor, own and run a large Christian retreat in northern California called JH Ranch. JH Israel, a sister organization they set up for fundraising purposes, built the National Leadership Center in Ariel based on the same model.

The JH Israel website boasts that with its new Israeli government contract, the facility in Ariel becomes "the only recognized provider

embracing their biblical and cultural heritage."



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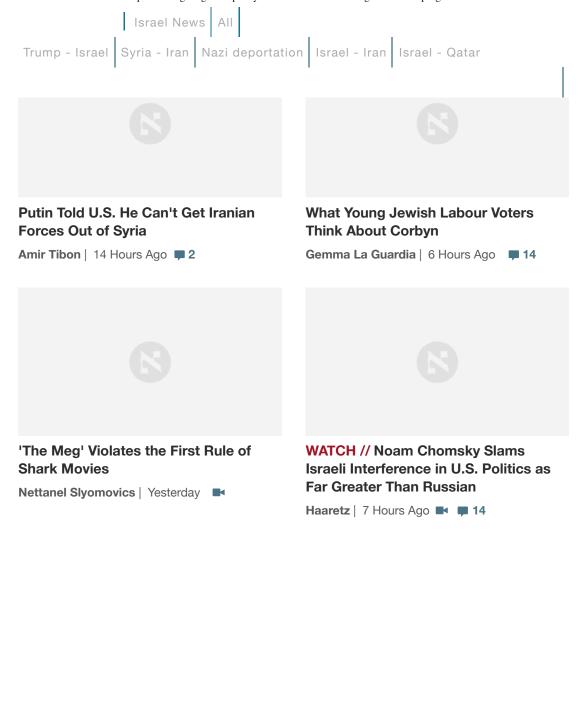
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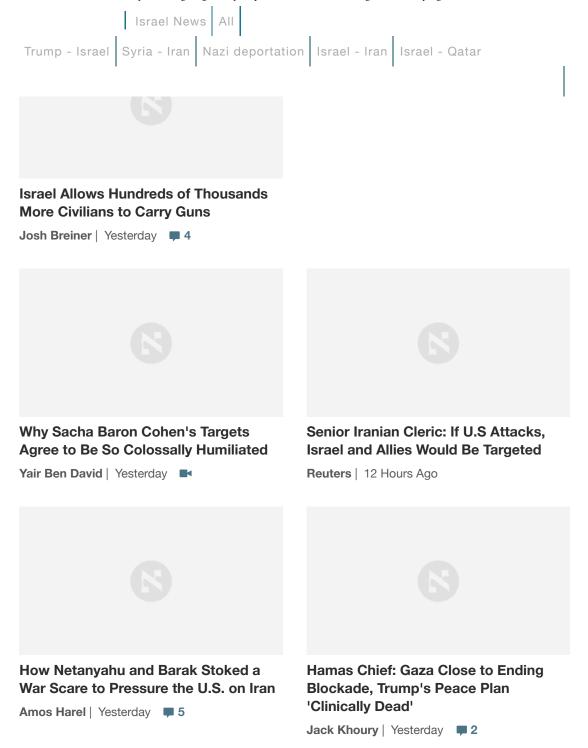


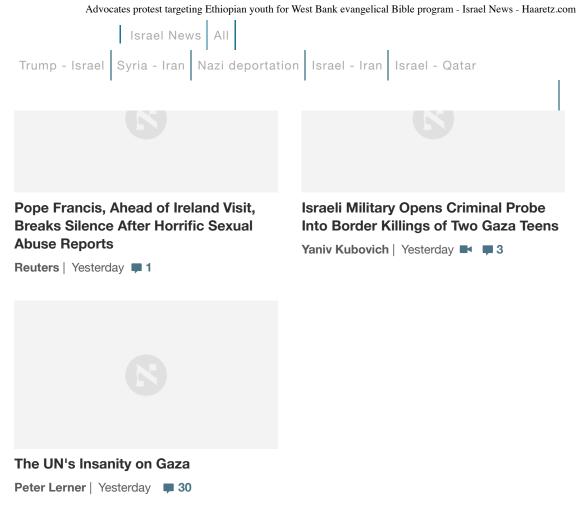
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