

SIX KIDNAPPED LEBANESE JEWS ARE REPORTED TO BE ALIVE AND IN THE HANDS OF EXTREMIST PRO-IRANIAN GROUP
By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Sept. 5 (JTA) — The six prominent Lebanese Jews kidnapped in recent months are alive and in the hands of the Hezbollah, the extremist pro-Iranian Shiite faction, according to a senior Lebanese government official.

President Amin Gemayel's Chief of Protocol, Marun Haimari, said in a cable to Paris on Wednesday that the six Jewish hostages were alive. Haimari advised the president of the Representative Council of French Jews (CRIF), Theo Klein, to intercede on their behalf through the Syrian and Libyan governments. Haimari also mentioned Lebanese Education Minister Selim Hoss and Hezbollah leader Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah as possible contacts.

Klein has repeatedly cabled and written Gemayel and other Lebanese leaders to try and obtain the liberation of the six, or at least to ascertain their fate. Wednesday's cable is the first formal acknowledgement that the six are alive.

The Missing Six

The missing six are:

* Elie Hallack, 55, vice president of the Central Committee of the Lebanese Jewish community. A respected doctor, he was kidnapped from his home at 3 a.m. on March 30, 1985.

* Elie Srour, 50, was kidnapped on that same day at 7 p.m. outside his electrical equipment store in central Beirut. He was in charge of the community's funeral arrangements.

* Haim Cohen, 50, a businessman was also kidnapped on March 30, at 7:30 a.m. from his home.

* Isaac Sasson, 65, president of the Lebanese Jewish community. He was kidnapped by an armed gang on March 31 while on his way from Beirut International Airport to the center of the city. Eye-witnesses said that Sasson, a prominent business executive, was accompanied by an armed military escort which offered no resistance to the kidnapers.

* Isaac Tallab, a bachelor, was kidnapped sometime in July 1985. He was a teacher at the French high school.

* Selim Jamous, the Jewish community's former Secretary General, has been missing since August 1984. He was kidnapped from his office in the community building in Beirut and his family had had no confirmation since that he is alive.

Another Kidnap Victim Is Jewish

Of the four Frenchmen kidnapped earlier this year in Beirut, one is a Jew: Jean Paul Kauffmann, 43. A reporter, he was kidnapped while on his way from the airport to the air terminal in Central Beirut. He is believed to be in the hands of the Hezbollah who have promised to release him after Israel frees the last Shiite prisoners still held at Atlit prison.

Israeli Premier Shimon Peres said this week that the last prisoners will be set free within a week or 10 days at the utmost. The fate of the six missing Lebanese Jews is not linked to the release of the Shiite prisoners in Israel.

CHANCES IMPROVED FOR A PERES-MUBARAK SUMMIT MEETING
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 5 (JTA) — Prospects seem to have improved for a summit meeting between Premier Shimon Peres and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, sources close to Peres indicated today. The two leaders will be in New York at the same time later this month to attend the 40th anniversary session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The chances of a summit may have been enhanced, these sources hinted, by the discreet visit to Cairo this week of Gen. (Res.) Avraham Tamir, Director General of the Prime Ministers Office. They described it as "a great success" noting that Tamir met twice in 24 hours with Mubarak.

Well placed sources told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency today that Tamir's primary mission was to convey new Israeli proposals for a solution of the Taba dispute. Taba is a tiny strip of beach west of Eilat which is claimed by both Israel and Egypt.

The sources said Peres informed Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Tamir's mission but did not seek his approval. They said Shamir received a preliminary report of Tamir's talks in Cairo before he left today on an official visit to Japan. The sources would not divulge the contents of a personal message from Peres which Tamir delivered to Mubarak.

Shamir insists that the Taba dispute be resolved by conciliation. Egypt will accept only binding arbitration. While Peres and his Labor Party ministers are prepared to accede to Egypt on this, Shamir and his Likud colleagues in the Inner Cabinet have blocked any concessions. The Inner Cabinet consists of five Labor and five Likud ministers.

Nevertheless, the deadlock has not prevented a meeting being set up in New York this month between Shamir and Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismet Abdul Meguid.

While in Cairo, Tamir met the newly installed Egyptian Prime Minister, Ali Lufy, who is an economist by training. Lufy has replaced Prime Minister Kemal Hassan Ali who resigned, reportedly for health reasons. His departure is deeply regretted in Israeli circles. Hassan Ali is regarded as one of the "last of the Mohicans," an astute Egyptian diplomat who was intimately involved in the Israeli-Egyptian peace process since its beginning in 1979.

ISRAELI CIVILIAN SERIOUSLY WOUNDED IN KNIFE ATTACK IN GAZA
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 5 (JTA) — A 28-year-old Israeli driver of an oil truck was seriously wounded in a knife attack in Gaza today. The man, a resident of Beersheba, was not immediately identified. He underwent surgery at a hospital and reportedly is out of danger.

The assault occurred while the driver was making a delivery at a Gaza gasoline station. Two youths attacked him from behind and stabbed him three times in the back and chest. Security forces clamped a curfew on Falastin Square in the center of the city and began a search for the assailants. Several suspects were arrested.

Unrest continued in the West Bank. Two fire bombs were thrown at an Israeli bus outside Nablus today, shattering the windshield. No one was hurt. The bus belongs to the Dan cooperative. Security forces are searching the area. Two shops near the scene of the attack were ordered closed for three days by the military authorities.

Meanwhile, militant Jewish settlers, fully armed, paraded through the streets of the Arab town of Ramallah in the West Bank today in what they said was a demonstration of force to teach the Arab populace that Jews would not be intimidated by the recent attacks on them in the territory. The militants said they planned to do the same in other Arab towns.

The demonstration followed Tuesday's fatal knife attack on an Israeli soldier in Hebron and the wounding of another soldier there.

REAGAN ADMINISTRATION EXPLAINS 'LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIPS' BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SAUDI ARABIA

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Sept. 5 (JTA) -- The Reagan Administration maintained today that while the U.S. has no agreement with Saudi Arabia allowing the U.S. to use Saudi military bases in case of a military emergency, the "long-standing relationships" between the two countries has resulted in such requests being honored.

But State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb, in making the statement, could give no example of when the Saudis had agreed to such a request in order to aid a U.S. mission rather than just a Saudi need. Kalb also indicated that the Administration was close to announcing new arms sales for Saudi Arabia and Jordan. But here, too, he would not be specific.

The Administration's statement came after a report in The New York Times today that Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, has given members of Congress a memorandum which states that the Saudis will allow the U.S. to use its bases in case of "aggression" by the Soviet Union or if Saudi Arabia was unable to handle a situation in the Persian Gulf.

The memorandum was a 17-page summary of the Administration's recently completed study of arms sales to the Middle East.

Kalb refused to comment directly on the newspaper story. But he said "Saudi Arabia has no agreement with the U.S. on the use of Saudi military facilities. However, we have long-standing relationships based on mutual interest in the stability of the region. When U.S. assistance has been requested and provided in response to specific threats, the facilities necessary to support such assistance have been made available."

An Example Is Offered

As an example, Kalb gave the stationing of four U.S. AWACS electronic surveillance aircraft in Saudi Arabia after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. These were to provide warning of any attack on Saudi Arabia. But when pressed to give an example of a request being approved on purely U.S. interests, he could not.

Asked about arms sales to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Kalb noted that all weapons sales to the

Middle East have been held up pending the just completed study on which members of Congress are now being briefed on a classified basis. "I would therefore expect a number of programs which have been on hold to go forward shortly," he said. But he would not give either specific nations or numbers.

Saudi Arabia has been seeking to buy 40 F-15 jet fighters and Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and Sidewinder air-to-air missiles. Jordan wants to buy F-16 fighters as well as anti-aircraft missiles.

The Administration has held up the announcement of a sale to either country for more than a year because of strong opposition in the House and Senate where a majority in both chambers are against the sale of any weapons to Arab countries until Jordan agrees to direct negotiations with Israel.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS DEMONSTRATE OUTSIDE OFFICES OF CHIEF RABBINICAL COUNCIL

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 5 (JTA) -- Ethiopian Jewish immigrants demonstrated outside the offices of the Chief Rabbinical Council today and yesterday, charging that the Council was not honoring an agreement to facilitate marriages within the Ethiopian community.

Leaders of the community will meet with Premier Shimon Peres Sunday to air their complaints. Peres was instrumental in getting the Chief Rabbinate to agree to sanction marriages of Ethiopian couples who could prove they are Jewish. Otherwise they would have to undergo ritual immersion, a religious conversion rite.

The Chief Rabbis originally demanded that all members of the Ethiopian emigre community perform the ritual and would not allow them to marry if they refused. The Ethiopians, all devout practitioners of Judaism, denounced this as an insult which cast doubt on their authenticity as Jews.

The agreement was expected to end the conflict which has marred the absorption of the Ethiopian Jews since their arrival in Israel last year. The community leaders now say it has not been honored. Absorption Minister Yaacov Tsur, who visited the demonstrators today, said he agreed with them that the Chief Rabbinical Council was dragging its feet.

USSR REVERSES DECISION ON VISA FOR PUBLISHER TO ATTEND MOSCOW BOOK FAIR

WASHINGTON, Sept. 5 (JTA) -- Reversing an earlier decision, the Soviet Union granted a visa yesterday to Bernard Levinson, president of the Association of Jewish Book Publishers, to attend the Fifth Moscow International Book Fair. The fair opens Tuesday.

Robert Bernstein, president of Random House, and Jari Laber, two other Americans who asked for visas to attend the fair, and were rejected, will not get visas, an official of the Soviet Embassy here said.

Levinson learned about his first rejection last week and immediately complained to book fair officials. The Embassy official did not explain why the three Americans were barred or why the ban on Levinson had been lifted and not on the other two.

AMERICAN-BORN RABBI, WHO GAINED PROMINENCE AS HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST IN ARGENTINA, NAMED SENIOR RABBI OF CONGREGATION B'NAI JESHURUN
By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, Sept. 5 (JTA) — Marshall Meyer, an American-born Conservative rabbi whose human rights activities in Argentina thrust him into national prominence, has been named senior rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun here, it was announced today.

The 55-year-old Meyer will succeed Rabbi William Berkowitz, who retired from his post as head of the Upper West Side synagogue in August, 1984. Berkowitz has for the past 35 years conducted the popular Dialogue Forum Series in New York. Meyer will assume his new duties at Sabbath eve services tomorrow.

Ernest Schwartz, president of B'nai Jeshurun, in making the announcement to reporters, described Meyer as "a man of extraordinary energy. Having him here is great for B'nai Jeshurun, great for the Upper West Side, and great for the Conservative movement."

Meyer, who last year served as vice president of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, had for the previous 22 years been spiritual leader of Comunidad Bet El in Belgrano, a suburb of Buenos Aires. In 1962 he founded the Seminario Rabinico Latino-Americano in Buenos Aires, serving as its rector.

Meyer said today that B'nai Jeshurun will seek to offer New York Jewry a place for all segments of the population — senior citizens, singles, children, and young couples. He said community and ecumenical affairs along with social action will be part of his activities while rabbi of the synagogue.

Contact Was Initiated Last Year

Schwartz told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that a search committee was formed to find a new rabbi for the ninth oldest synagogue in the United States — the first Ashkenazic synagogue in New York — after Berkowitz notified the synagogue of his intention to leave the post.

Contact was initiated with Meyer in December, 1984. Schwartz said he was offered the post last March by unanimous approval of the 11-member Board of Trustees of the synagogue. He responded affirmatively to the offer last June, according to Schwartz.

The synagogue, celebrating its 160th year, had an average membership of 100 persons during the High Holy Day services last year. Officials for B'nai Jeshurun anticipate Meyer will attract new members, although they declined to speculate on how many.

Pointing out Meyer's "qualities of courage, leadership and scholarship," Schwartz said, "we look forward to the key role that he will play in the spiritual and physical revival of our synagogue."

Activities In Argentina

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Norwich, Connecticut, Meyer attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, and received his rabbinical ordination in 1958 from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The following year he went to Argentina where he had a post as an assistant rabbi in a German synagogue in Buenos Aires.

That short term assignment turned into a 25-year stay in that country, during which he led congregation Bet El from a synagogue in a private home with 30 worshippers to a larger institution with more than a thousand families and its own school system and a summer camp, that has sent some 2,000 youth on aliya to Israel.

During his years in Argentina, he also witnessed the savage brutality of both the extreme right and left and of the military regimes that followed the collapse of Maria Estela Peron's government in 1976. He became an outspoken critic of the military junta's human rights abuses. Some 1,500 Jews were among the some 15,000 persons who disappeared during Argentina's "dirty war" years in the mid 1970's.

In 1984, Meyer was one of two Jews appointed by President Raul Alfonsin to a 16-member government investigative committee that looked into the disappearance of thousands of Argentinians. The committee's report was presented to the government, and its findings serve as evidence now being used during trials of leaders of the former military regimes in Argentina.

Role Of Rabbi In The Community

According to Meyer, the rabbi of a congregation must serve as a moral and spiritual leader whose responsibilities must include pointing out social injustices. "The synagogue is a place where one should not be served as aspirin," he said, but should be provided with the "moral strength" to confront social and other issues deemed important to the betterment of society.

In stressing the need of the synagogue to work within the community, Meyer said "it would be the irony of ironies to be totally concerned with that which is Jewish." He said that "a community that is only able to speak out when confronted with anti-Semitism" and not when the rights of other community members are threatened, "loses its right to speak."

On Israel, the rabbi asserted, "We believe most fervently that Israel occupies the role as the center of the Jewish people." He said he and the congregation will work to enhance that role. In 1984 he was given the Dor L'dor Award of the International B'nai B'rith for outstanding achievements in the service of humanity.

REFORM LEADER SAYS THERE WERE REFORM RABBIS IN POLAND

NEW YORK, Sept. 5 (JTA) — A spokesman for Reform Judaism said today that a leading Orthodox rabbi was "in error" when he publicly asserted this week that there had never been a Reform rabbi of a synagogue in Poland. The statement by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of North America, is incorrect, said Rabbi Philip Hiat, assistant to Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Noting that the Bar Mitzvah of a Stamford, Conn. youth is scheduled to be held in the Temple Synagogue in Cracow, Hiat said:

"This synagogue was dedicated as a Reform synagogue in 1844. Its most prominent spiritual leader was Osias Thon, a Reform rabbi who was also a member of the Polish Sejm (Senate) and a key figure in the Zionist movement in Galicia, who died in 1936." Other leading Polish Reform rabbis cited by Rabbi Hiat included Samuel Abraham Poznanski (1864-1921), who served as the Reform rabbi of Tlomacka Synagogue in Warsaw, and who was succeeded by another Reform rabbi, Moses Schorr, who died during the Nazi occupation.

SPECIAL TO THE JTA THE SOUND OF ANCIENT MELODIES

By Marlene Goldman

NEW YORK, Sept. 5 (JTA) — Members of Congregation Bina, the Bene Israel Jews of India affiliate here, shared their 2,000-year-old melodies and traditions with an attentive and enthusiastic audience at the third annual Jewish Arts Festival of Long Island last weekend.

Led by Elijah Jhirad, president of the Congregation Bina, the Indian representatives conducted Hebrew prayers interwoven with the ancient seven-note melody line identified with Indian music. But the one-hour presentation could not capture the entire vibrant history of the Bene Israel community that remained isolated from the rest of the world until the middle of the 18th century.

Jhirad, one of the founding members of ORT-India, and who was the representative of the Indian Jewish Congress to the World Jewish Congress, said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "We have called ourselves Bene Israel because when we founded our home in India 2,000 years ago, the term Jew hadn't come into existence, so we retained the Biblical Bene Israel — Children of Israel." This, he noted, "had a marvelous effect on the Moslems who came to India because they seemed to honor the term Bene Israel and not the term Jew."

Dispute Over Origins Of The Group

Scholars still dispute the origins of the group. The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia quotes the compiler of the Imperial Gazetteer of India: "In the second century a Roman merchant fleet of 100 sails steered regularly from Myos Hormus in the Red Sea to Arabia, Ceylon and Malabar. It found an ancient Jewish colony, the remnants of which still remain to this day as the Bene Israel upon the Bombay coast."

It is probable, the Encyclopedia added, that the Jewish settlements in India date as early as the first century. Bene Israel legend has it that they are descendants of Asher and Zebulun, the two seafaring tribes, who were shipwrecked in the Indian Ocean fleeing the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes in 175-163 BCE.

Jhirad said, "According to tradition, our people had gone by sea and the ship was wrecked with only a few couples landing on shore. They had lost everything, and the only thing they remembered was the Shema and whatever the occasion — death, marriage, birth — they would say the Shema."

The couples, seven men and seven women, who supposedly landed at Navgaon on the Konkan coast of India — south of Bombay — also retained Jewish customs of observing the Sabbath, Biblical holidays, the dietary laws of kashrut and rituals of circumcision, all of which they passed on to future generations.

"Although we were so different from our neighbors in every respect — we bury our dead, they cremate their dead — we lived with a people who were really tolerant," remarked Jhirad.

According to him, the group of Indian Jews settled down on the farms, eventually producing and selling oil and earned the name of "Shanvar Telis," or "Saturday oilpresser," alluding to their former occupation and the fact that they kept the Sabbath.

Coupled with a desire to uphold the basic tenets of Judaism, the Indian Jews were eager to learn the Bible. "There's one factor people try to suppress," observed Jhirad, "and that is, although we had the Cochin Jews and the Baghdadi Jews who came to India, it was not they so much who were responsible for giving us the knowledge of Hebrew. Surprisingly enough, it was the Christian missionaries." Continuing, he said:

"The American and Scottish missions came to Bombay and said 'Oh, look! These people are ripe for conversion and what we ought to do is set up schools to teach Hebrew.' " But there were few conversions and Jhirad praised the Christians because "to their credit they didn't hold it against us and they continued this kind of education and, not only that, they were responsible for us enjoying Hebrew and Judaic studies."

It was also the Christians who translated the Bible to Marathi, the group's language, "and that was the greatest boost to us because then the Bible came to everybody — every man, woman, and child," Jhirad said.

The learned Cochin Jews, located on the southern tip of India, traveled north, meeting the Bene Israel Jews and helped them link their strands of Jewish tradition and understanding together. In 1796, they helped establish Bene Israel's first synagogue, Gate of Mercy, in Bombay.

Some 30,000 to 40,000 Of The Group Live In Israel

By 1947, the Bene Israel in India consisted of between 35,000-40,000 Jews, but some 40 years later, the community has dwindled to about 5,000. Jhirad, who was the Judge Advocate-General of the Indian Navy from 1946-1964, pointed to the development of the State of Israel as the reason for the depleted population in India.

Currently, about 30,000 to 35,000 Jews from Bene Israel of some 40,000 worldwide live in Israel. Jhirad, who in 1967 left India for Israel where he served as advisor to the government on maritime transport and trade, hopes they will integrate. "The whole purpose of our going to Israel is to integrate into the mainstream," he asserted. "For me, I am a Jew, and my identity as a Jew is far more important than my individual identity in Bene Israel."

But Jhirad also believes in upholding their songs and customs. This prompted him to become active in the four-year-old B'nai Bina Congregation that serves 35-40 families in the N.Y.-N.J.-Conn. tri-state area. "One of the reasons for the congregation was to try and make a record of our traditions, our music, our culture, and our history," declared Jhirad. "We are trying to preserve particularly the old songs that were never written down and that are so different from the Sephardic and Ashkenazic melodies."

Jhirad and his co-performers at the Long Island festival introduced many American Jews to these unique melodies and to the "kirtan," poetic paraphrases of Biblical stories. The performance by Congregation Bina was only one of the arts presentations at the festival, the largest celebration of the Jewish arts in the U.S. and which is sponsored by the United Jewish Ys of Long Island.

Between 10,000 and 15,000 people were treated to a Labor Day weekend of klezmer music, Israeli song and dance, and Jewish humor and theater.