



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The remains of two Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon 10 years ago were returned to Israel, which in exchange released dozens of bodies of Hezbollah fighters killed in clashes with the Israel Defense Force. The German official who mediated the handover hinted that he would continue contacts to obtain information on other missing Israeli servicemen. [Page 3]

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel will establish a new organization to take over its operation in Russia. The new body, which includes Russian Jewish leaders among its founders, is the latest effort by the agency to obtain from Russian authorities the accreditation that was canceled three months ago. [Page 2]

■ Jerusalem's Bar Ilan Street was the site of protests for the second weekend in a row, as fervently Orthodox and secular Israelis clashed on whether to keep the road open on the Sabbath. Israel's High Court of Justice has temporarily blocked implementation of a government decision to close the road, which cuts through religious neighborhoods.

■ Demonstrators protested outside the president's residence in Jerusalem because of his decision to free two female Palestinian prisoners convicted of murder. Meanwhile, the organization Victims of Arab Terror has petitioned the High Court of Justice, saying that the two women were being granted pardons for political, not humanitarian reasons.

■ Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar signed into law a counterterrorism bill that makes it a criminal offense to provide funds or other material support for international terrorist activity. The state measure complements similar federal legislation that was enacted last year.

■ Jewish settlers and Palestinians went head-to-head during the weekend in the West Bank, prompting the Israel Defense Force to impose a curfew on the Arab village of Karyut. Palestinians in the village demonstrated against what they said were attempts by Jews to expand the boundaries of the nearby Shiloh settlement.

Bitterness and sorrow mark anniversary of AMIA bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Bitter memories and angry recriminations against the Argentine government characterized the solemn ceremonies held here to commemorate the victims of the 1994 terror bombing of the Jewish community's headquarters.

The still-fresh feelings of grief and sharp calls for justice were joined by the fear among Argentina's 250,000 Jews, the world's seventh-largest Diaspora community and the largest in South America, that they could again become the target of terrorists.

Thousands of Argentines turned out last week to mark the second anniversary of the July 18, 1994, attack on the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, also known as AMIA, that left 86 dead and more than 300 wounded.

Israeli officials and American and Canadian Jewish leaders participated in the two July 18 ceremonies. They joined in the sorrowful remembrance and in the searing criticism of the way the government has handled the investigation.

The anniversary was also remembered in the Israeli Knesset and in the halls of the U.S. Congress, where 42 members of the House of Representatives signed a letter calling on Argentine President Carlos Menem "to redouble your government's efforts in this task" of apprehending those behind the bombing.

In an action coinciding with the anniversary, the American Jewish Committee issued an investigative report on the bombing that roundly criticized the Argentine government's handling of the AMIA investigation.

The report cited incompetence, corruption and anti-Semitism among security and government officials as causes for the Argentine judiciary's inability to solve the case.

Despite a much-publicized series of raids and arrests, Argentina has failed to find those responsible for carrying out the AMIA bombing.

Although it denounced Iran for backing the attack, the Argentine government also failed to prove Iranian involvement, the report charged.

The government has likewise failed to find those responsible for the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which left 29 dead and some 100 wounded.

These failures, and the feeling that justice for the AMIA bombing victims may never be achieved, pervaded last week's commemorations.

Some 2,500 people gathered last week at the site of the bombing on Pasteur Street by 9:53 a.m., the exact time of the explosion.

A shofar was sounded; emotions reached a peak when Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the recently retired leader of the American Reform movement, read Kaddish for the victims.

Also present at the commemoration was a delegation of American Jewish officials who were participating in the biennial meeting of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

The Americans joined Argentines in lighting candles for each of the 86 victims of the bombing.

'No to Impunity'

In the afternoon, more than 10,000 people gathered on Pasteur Street for a second ceremony.

Stretched across the street was a banner that read, "No to Impunity, Yes to Justice."

Oscar Hansman, the new president of AMIA, said his organization "will not cease to seek justice until the last link in the chain of crime and complicity is exposed."

"Almost all voices claiming for justice in Argentina are Jewish," said Hansman, "and that worries and scares me."

"People seem not to understand that the massacre took place at the AMIA building, but the victims were fellow citizens who were not solely Jews," he said.

"We ask the government to solve the AMIA case in order to give all Argentines a sense of security. We ask our fellow Argentines to stop being

indifferent, to abandon their sense of neutrality," said Hansman.

Jewish leaders read a message from the Knesset that expressed solidarity with Argentine Jews.

"We hope that the culprits are caught," read the message, "and that their capture exposes the forces of darkness that attack Jewish institutions the world over."

Diana Malamud, who lost her husband in the bombing, spoke on behalf of the relatives of the victims.

"State-sponsored violence was reinforced by impunity and by the indifference of this government," Malamud said. "How can I explain to my daughters that their father was murdered two years ago and so few seem to care?"

"We now know that the Argentine government lacks the political will to solve this case."

Malamud listed instances of police neglect, incompetence and corruption in the handling of the case.

"But it took two years to finally investigate the police," Malamud said, referring to the recent arrests of 18 Buenos Aires police officers on charges that authorities hope to connect to the blast.

Also among the speakers was Ruben Beraja, president of the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA. Visibly shaken by the emotional tone of Malamud's words, Beraja called the terrorists that bombed AMIA "this country's enemies."

"Iran is behind this bombing. The Iranian Embassy here is behind this bombing — the same embassy that threatens Argentine Jewish officials with violence if we don't stop denouncing Islamic terrorism."

Israel's ambassador to Argentina, Itzhak Aviran, said there was "no longer any optimism about finding those responsible, because we have already been waiting two years to find out something about AMIA and over four for something about the embassy bombers."

In its report, "Waiting for Justice, Two Years After the AMIA Bombing," the AJCommittee cited high levels of corruption and incompetence among Argentina's law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Evidence has surfaced that the police may have been involved in the selling of the van used in the AMIA car bombing attack, the report said, adding that some suspects have evaded arrest because they were tipped off by police officers.

The report also said anti-Semitism may have played a part in the government's fruitless investigations. While stressing that Argentina is predominantly a tolerant country, the report said that "the military, the police and the intelligence services have shown high levels of bigotry, anti-Semitism and rejection of democratic values."

More terror feared

A notable case, according to the report, was Justice Minister Rodolfo Barra, who was working closely on the AMIA case and who resigned earlier this month in the wake of reports about his past involvement with a violent anti-Semitic group.

Citing the exposure of Barra's past, B'nai B'rith President Tommy Baer last week sent a letter to Menem calling for the investigation and removal of any government official who has associated with extremist groups.

Given the inadequacy of Argentina's security forces, along with the need to upgrade security at the country's borders, the AJCommittee report found that the local Jewish community's fears of another terrorist attack are fully justified.

Those fears have prompted the community to seek added security for their institutions and schools, where private guards and police, along with concrete sidewalk barriers to prevent car bombings, are now a common sight.

The new AMIA building, already under construction, is being built with an eye toward future security precautions.

It will be set a few yards from the sidewalk behind a reinforced wall; the front of the building will have small windows, and they will be found only above the third story. A security checkpoint, with bulletproof glass and automatic doors, will be built at the entrance.

(JTA intern Heather Camlot in New York contributed to this report.)

Jewish Agency to establish new group for Russia operation

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Jewish Agency for Israel is creating a new organization that emphasizes local leadership to take over its operation in Russia.

Establishment of the new group, the Jewish Agency in the Russian Federation, is intended to settle an ongoing dispute between the Jewish Agency and Russian authorities about the agency's accreditation.

The agency's decision to create a new body comes in the wake of the Russian Justice Ministry's refusal last month to renew the accreditation, which was canceled in April.

The new organization will include both Russian and Israeli citizens as its co-founders, said Aryeh Sadeh, head of the agency's delegation to the former Soviet Union. Among the co-founders are Russia's chief rabbi, Adolph Shayeich; Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt; the lawyer for the agency's delegation in Moscow, David Akselband; and the agency's financial director, Dani Pines.

"This new structure meets our general policy to be supported by local initiative," Sadeh said.

By listing Russian nationals among its founders, the agency appears to be trying to change how its activities are perceived by Russian authorities. Currently, authorities have been treating the agency as a foreign-based international organization founded by non-Russian citizens. That may be the reason why renewal of the agency's accreditation has been held up for three months.

Last Friday, the new organization submitted its registration application to the Justice Ministry. The agency expects that approval will take a few weeks, though it is not yet clear whether Russian authorities are ready to quickly process a new set of documents.

Meanwhile, the United States has intervened in an effort to press Russia to resolve the dispute. Vice President Al Gore, who was in Moscow last week, raised the question about the agency's representation in his meeting with Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, who reportedly promised an expeditious resolution of the matter.

"Chernomyrdin assured us the issue would be resolved and resolved in a positive way," said Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, who spoke with the premier during a reception given here by the premier and Gore.

"We are gratified the American government continued to raise this at the highest level."

Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg is scheduled to visit Moscow later this week. Burg's visit, which will include meetings with Russian officials and leaders of Russian Jewish organizations, is seen here as a factor that might hasten registration of the new organization.

Meanwhile, Jewish Agency officials in Russia are busy with their routine summer job — organizing youth camps. Some 19,000 Jewish youths are attending 37 summer camps across the former Soviet Union. □

Germany mediates exchange between Hezbollah and Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A decade of uncertainty and anguish for two Israeli families came to an end this week with the arrival at Ben-Gurion Airport of two metal coffins containing the bodies of Israeli soldiers Yosef Fink and Rachamim Alsheikh.

Fink and Alsheikh were taken captive in Lebanon in 1986, when Hezbollah gunmen ambushed a convoy of the pro-Israel South Lebanon Army that the two were escorting inside the security zone.

They were officially declared dead five years later, but their remains were only returned to Israel this week as part of an exchange of prisoners and bodies that was mediated by Germany.

Sunday's exchange raised hopes of a possible agreement between Israel and Lebanon for halting Hezbollah hostilities in what is the Jewish state's sole active war front.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he did not believe that the exchange indicated a shift in the policies of Hezbollah, which has been waging an armed conflict against Israeli and SLA forces in the southern Lebanon security zone.

"If there is such a change, we welcome it," Netanyahu told a news conference after the exchange took place. But he added that Israel did not intend in the meantime to withdraw its troops from the security zone.

The two metal coffins containing the remains of Fink and Alsheikh arrived Sunday at Ben-Gurion Airport on a German military plane from Beirut. The bodies had been handed over to the German mediators by the Red Cross, which received them earlier from Hezbollah.

In return for their bodies, Israel exhumed and returned to Lebanon the remains of 120 Hezbollah fighters killed in clashes with the Israel Defense Force in the security zone.

'Bodies for bodies'

And in the second part of the exchange, Hezbollah freed 17 SLA soldiers it was holding in exchange for the release of 45 Shi'ite prisoners held in southern Lebanon by the SLA.

As the bodies of the two soldiers were returned to the Jewish state, Israeli officials vowed to continue efforts to obtain information about other missing and captured Israeli soldiers.

"We see this as an encouraging sign for the continued effort to bring all of Israel's missing and captured soldiers home," Ya'acov Peri, a former head of the Shin Bet domestic security service who served as the leader of the Israeli negotiating team in the exchange, told the news conference.

Bernd Schmidbauer, the German official who mediated the exchange, hinted this week that he hoped to continue efforts to obtain information from Syria and Iran regarding other missing Israeli soldiers.

"This is an important step toward additional discussions on the same matter," said Schmidbauer.

Germany was able to negotiate the exchange as a result of its ongoing ties with Iran, which sponsors Hezbollah activities in Lebanon. The German mediation effort reportedly intensified three months ago.

During a telephone call at the time with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres gave Germany the go-ahead to negotiate on the basis of "bodies for bodies, live prisoners for live prisoners."

While Israel has in the past protested Germany's ties with Iran, Netanyahu said Sunday that he did not

oppose any contacts between Germany and Iran regarding the exchange. "This is a humanitarian issue, entirely separated from other matters in dispute," Netanyahu said.

He said he hoped that other missing and captured Israeli soldiers would soon return to Israel.

Netanyahu added that he had no new information regarding four other missing Israeli soldiers: Ron Arad, the air force navigator shot over Lebanon in 1986; and Zechariah Baumel, Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz, who were taken prisoner during the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee.

Of the four, only Arad is believed to be still alive.

To retain its bargaining position for more information about the four MIAs, Israel refused to free two Hezbollah leaders, Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani. Obeid was abducted from his home in Lebanon by Israeli commandos in 1988; Dirani was abducted in a similar operation in 1994.

Meanwhile, in Ra'anana and Rosh Ha'ayin, members of the Fink and Alsheikh families expressed an odd sense of relief at being finally able to bury their sons in Israel. □

Defamation suit in Turkey focuses on Holocaust denial

By Suzan N. Tarablus

ISTANBUL (JTA) — A Turkish author is suing for defamation of character because of an opinion piece that accuses him of being a Holocaust denier.

The piece, written by columnist Bedri Baykam for the March 19 edition of the Turkish daily Siyah-Beyaz (Black-White), denounced the book "Holocaust — The Jewish Invention" as "dirty propaganda."

"I believe that this publication offends the Jewish citizens of Turkey as well as Jews all over the world," Baykam, a well-known Turkish painter and writer, said in an interview.

"I am a Muslim citizen of this secular democratic republic, which should not make any discrimination of language, religion or race among its people," Baykam said.

The book, which was written by Harun Yahya, a pen name of Nuri Ozbudak, has been praised in Turkish newspapers affiliated with the country's Islamist Welfare Party, whose leader, Necmettin Erbakan, recently became prime minister. Ozbudak claims in his book that there was elaborate cooperation between Adolf Hitler and the Jews, and that the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust actually fell victim to a massive typhus epidemic.

According to the book, the Nazis used the concentration camps to quarantine the affected population.

Ozbudak's lawyer, Mehmet Sahim, said the book was based on extensive research of more than 100 documents in four different languages.

He also said Jewish propaganda had led people to believe that the Holocaust was a genocide against the Jewish people.

"You don't need to be a Jew to give a strong reaction against an anti-Semitic campaign," Baykam wrote in his March 19 column. He expressed concern that younger Turks, "when they read such stupidities, because they have not lived those days, or met anybody who told them the truth, can believe those stories."

Sahim, saying that Baykam's article brought both personal and commercial prejudice to his client, is seeking compensation for defamation of character.

At the first session of the trial held here, the judge said he could not make decisions about history. The trial is scheduled to resume Sept. 25.

Baykam said that after the trial ends, he planned to sue Ozbudak and demand that all issues of the book be banned. □

Touvier, jailed for ordering execution of 7 Jews, is dead

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — Paul Touvier, the only Frenchman convicted of crimes against humanity, died last week of prostate cancer in a prison hospital outside Paris.

Touvier, 81, was the intelligence chief of Lyon's pro-Nazi militia during World War II.

In 1994, after more than 40 years on the run, he was jailed for ordering the execution of seven Jewish hostages.

During the terminal stage of his cancer, Touvier had been in the intensive care unit of the hospital in the Fresnes prison.

Touvier's son and daughter had asked President Jacques Chirac last month to pardon their father so that he could die a free man.

But that request and four other pleas for his release on medical grounds were turned down.

Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld, who helped bring Touvier to justice, said in an interview that Touvier's death "was a non-event."

"Once he was in prison, we received news of it with indifference," Klarsfeld added.

Jacques Tremolet de Villers, Touvier's lawyer, said in a statement that Touvier "was finally free." The statement also said, "He was sentenced to life in prison, not to die in prison."

Touvier ordered the executions of seven Jewish hostages in reprisal for the killing of Vichy propaganda chief Philippe Henriot.

A firing squad shot the men outside the cemetery of Rileux-la-Pape, near Lyon, in June 1944, just two months before the area was liberated.

Touvier was a key aide during the war to Gestapo Chief Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon," tracking Jews and Resistance fighters and frequently confiscating their possessions. Barbie died in prison in 1991.

Touvier, who was sentenced in absentia to death in 1947, was pardoned in 1972 by President Georges Pompidou.

French police captured Touvier in 1989 in a southern French monastery, where he was hiding with his family. Revelations that he had been sheltered by right-wing Catholics deeply embarrassed France's Roman Catholic Church and reminded the French people of a past they had tried to forget.

When police took Touvier into custody, he had said, "I regret nothing."

The trial of Touvier, a middle-level official, was not a total victory for lawyers and families of Holocaust victims determined to prove that French participation in sending Jews to their deaths included those in the highest reaches of government.

Only one accused Nazi collaborator is still alive.

Maurice Papon, a senior official in the Vichy regime, is accused of deporting nearly 1,700 Jews from southwestern France. A Bordeaux court is scheduled to decide in September whether he should stand trial on crimes against humanity. □

Israeli election ads overlooked female voters, says new study

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Female voters and the issues that affect them received short shrift in televised advertisements related to the country's May 29 national elections, according to a study initiated by the Israel Women's Network.

Just 17 percent of the 1,966 individuals featured in the televised campaign ads were women, the study showed.

And when these women did appear, they were often anonymous figures. Names and titles usually were not mentioned.

Women also appeared in the ads for shorter periods of time than their male counterparts.

Also, the women who were featured seemed to be younger than 40.

According to the findings, the advertisements also differed by political party.

While a whopping 60 percent of advertisements prepared by the left-wing Hadash Party featured women, only 29 percent of the Meretz and Shas ads met this criterion.

Labor trailed with 17 percent, while Likud had the unwelcome distinction of featuring women in just 9 percent of its campaign broadcasts.

Issues of special interest to Israeli women — equality between the sexes, the representation of women in decision-making positions, longer school days, reproductive rights, women in the army — lagged behind such issues as security, the status of Jerusalem and the peace process.

However, the issue of violence against women "received considerable attention," the survey found.

"These findings are very disappointing," Leslie Sachs, director of the Women's Network, said this week in an interview.

"They show that women's issues are low on the agenda set by those who decide party policy," according to Sachs.

"In most cases [Israeli women] have not yet managed to penetrate these positions."

Sachs dubbed the study's findings "surprising" in light of that "when you talk to the parties, they acknowledge that the majority of their voters are women."

"If this is so, did they bother to do a survey to see what issues concern their voters?" she said. "The findings speak for themselves."

By the time the next campaign rolls around, Sachs said, "we hope to put women's issues on the national agenda." □

Canada moves to deport Bogutin

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO (JTA) — Canada has filed documents to deport Wasily Bogutin, accusing him of not revealing his World War II activity when he first came to that country.

Bogutin, 87, is suspected of taking part from 1941 to 1943 in the execution of civilians as well as arrests leading to deportations in German-occupied Ukraine.

The Canadian Justice Department, in documents made public last week, filed to strip Bogutin of his Canadian citizenship, saying that he concealed his membership in the Selidovka, the police unit in Ukraine in which he served.

"As war crimes continue throughout the world, it is imperative that Canada demonstrates that it will not be a haven for mass murderers," Lyle Smordin, president of B'nai Brith Canada, said in a statement.

Bogutin, who lives in Toronto, is the sixth accused war criminal in Canada charged from a list of 12.

In 1995, Ottawa pledged to bring deportation proceedings against the 12 men suspected of war crimes.

Earlier this month, a federal judge halted proceedings against three of the accused war criminals.

Canadian Jewish groups have repeatedly asked Ottawa to launch proceedings against the six war crimes suspects who have not yet been charged. □