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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak cancels trip to U.S.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak canceled a trip to Washington and postponed peace negotiations in Stockholm because of violence in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the United States proposed over the weekend that Israel and the Palestinians hold a summit next month to prepare the way for a final peace deal by mid-September. [Page 1]

Israel may leave Lebanon in June

Israeli Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ehud Barak reportedly told the army to be prepared to receive an order to withdraw from Lebanon beginning June 1, according to Israel Television. Israel has committed to pulling out of Lebanon by early July.

Politician: Accept patrilineals

An Israeli politician from the former Soviet Union called on the Reform movement in Israel to recognize children of Jewish fathers as Jews.

Roman Bronfman said the recognition would help many mixed-religion families who have immigrated from the former Soviet Union to Israel in recent years and are treated as second-class citizens.

Envoy to urge Israel on nukes

An international conference on nuclear weapons appointed a special representative to meet with Israel in an attempt to convince the Jewish state to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The appointment, reportedly at Egypt's urging, came at the end of a monthlong conference on the 30-year-old treaty, which seeks to limit nuclear weapons. Israel, Pakistan, India and Cuba are the only countries that have not signed the treaty.

AIPAC conference opens

Some 900 participants and 650 students opened the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

As part of their three-day gathering, the group is expected to lobby congressional leaders on such issues as the peace process, foreign aid to Israel and continuing sanctions against Iraq. Because of the unrest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Ehud Barak will not attend the conference. He will be replaced by Cabinet member Shimon Peres.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Violent Palestinian uprising even took Arafat by surprise

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Early last week, Yasser Arafat struck a match, but by week's end it seemed that he did not know how to put out the flames.

The Palestinian Authority president wanted a limited and controlled protest, but was surprised to be confronted with a massive, violent uprising — and the orders of his political leaders ignored by his own street protesters.

The threat of renewed violence in the territories had been hanging in the air for some time, but the scope of the violent demonstrations was much larger and more dramatic than anyone had anticipated.

Day after day, hundreds of Palestinian youths took to the streets, from Jenin in the north to the Gaza Strip in the south, engaged in gun battles with the Israelis and molotov cocktail attacks on soldiers and civilians.

By Sunday morning, five Palestinians had been killed and at least a thousand wounded.

In addition, Shalev Shabat, a 2-year-old Israeli toddler, was badly burned in a firebomb attack on a car in Jericho.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak canceled a scheduled meeting with President Clinton in Washington and ordered home the Israeli delegation to peace talks in Stockholm.

Israel and the Palestinians had been holding discussions in Sweden with the aim of working through obstacles toward reaching a framework for a final agreement.

The Israeli army banned civilians and tourists from entering Palestinian areas in the West Bank.

A statement from the Cabinet said Barak also expected "immediate results to the harsh messages sent to Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority after the Jericho attack."

The original cause of this latest flare-up in the territories was the Palestinian demand to release some 1,500 security prisoners from Israeli jails. The prisoners themselves have staged a two-week sit-in strike.

Israeli security experts were confident that Arafat was directly responsible for the escalation. However, according to Israeli analysts, Arafat was acting in response to pressure from the street.

The Palestinian people are frustrated on many levels: lack of progress on the political front, high unemployment and growing disenchantment with corruption among their leaders. While the economic situation at the refugee camps grows worse, a few Palestinian leaders enjoy a high standard of living.

The time was ripe for Arafat to give the green light to his own Fatah activists to take to the streets — armed with rifles — and order Palestinian policemen to back them up. He was thus diverting the political fire, turning it into real fire against Israeli soldiers.

Comparisons have been made between the recent uprising, and the intifada of 1987-1993. But there are a few key differences:

- Back then, unarmed youths confronted Israeli soldiers with stones and improvised Molotov cocktails. In the recent wave of violence, armed Palestinian policemen opened fire on Israeli soldiers.

- During the intifada, Israel controlled all of the Palestinian territories. Now the Palestinians administer some territory and are closer to an independent state, but are

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hezbollah attacks near Golan

Hezbollah attacked Israeli positions near the Golan Heights.

The Israeli army said the incident, in an area rarely attacked, was likely linked to an Israeli-Lebanese border dispute.

Lebanon claims the Shabaa Farms are Lebanese territory and has demanded their return as part of the Jewish state's planned troop withdrawal from Lebanon, which is expected to occur before July 7.

Israel sends message in Lebanon

Israeli planes destroyed tanks held by a radical Palestinian group at a base in Lebanon near the Syrian border.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said the strike against the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was a signal to all forces in Lebanon that Israel would retaliate against any attacks following its planned troop withdrawal.

Israel blasted for sex trade

Israel does not protect the rights of women who are brought from the former Soviet Union to work in the Jewish state as sex slaves, according to Amnesty International.

The London-based human rights group said in a report issued Thursday that hundreds of women a year are kidnapped or lured into Israel's sex industry, where they are bought and sold, imprisoned, deprived of their travel documents and tortured.

American to fly direct to Israel

American Airlines will begin direct daily flights to Israel from the United States, according to the Israeli newspaper Globes.

The move by American comes as airlines scramble to fill the void created when Tower Air canceled its flights to Tel Aviv earlier this month when it filed for bankruptcy.



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frustrated by lack of progress toward a final peace deal.

- In the previous uprising, the Palestinian target aimed to create momentum toward ending Israeli occupation. The present escalation is aimed at speeding up the actual negotiations and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

- Between 1987 and 1993, many Israelis accepted the violence as legitimate, and questioned the wisdom and justice of continued occupation. Now, even moderate Israelis are asking whether the Palestinians really want to make peace.

"When we negotiated the coalition with Ehud Barak," recalled Interior Minister Natan Sharansky, "he asked us not to include the word 'reciprocity' in the negotiations with the Palestinians "in the text of the coalition agreement. It was associated too much with Netanyahu.

"I said, 'OK, forget about the word, but will the principle of reciprocity be preserved?' I was assured that this would be so. Unfortunately, there is no reciprocity in the negotiations. We offer them Abu Dis, and they shoot at our soldiers."

Barak suspended a turnover of Abu Dis and two other Arab villages to Palestinian control "until things calm down." Consequently, the hawkish National Religious Party decided to suspend its plans to quit the coalition over the Abu Dis issue.

The cancellation of Barak's visit to the United States and his suspension of talks in Stockholm were also designed to signal to Arafat that Israel was no longer willing to talk as long as the Palestinians continued with violence.

Indeed, Barak called on the Palestinian Authority on Sunday to take steps to end the violence, which has now lasted nine days.

Maj. Gen. Moshe Ye'elon, of the Israel Defense Force's central command, warned that if the violent confrontation continued, the army would have to attack "with helicopters and tanks."

Meanwhile, U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, in Israel on Sunday, urged Israel and the Palestinians to move ahead with peace efforts.

"In the months ahead, we have a historic opportunity that we must not allow to slip away," he said in a speech in Tel Aviv. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Students in former Soviet Union will learn Judaism on computers

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — A collaboration among Israel, the Russian government and Jewish philanthropy is producing high-tech centers in eight Jewish schools in the former Soviet Union.

The schools, which accept Jewish and non-Jewish students, are being equipped with technology centers that will help teach Jewish studies with computers.

The schools are run by the Russian government; Israel is providing the Jewish curriculum and teachers.

All eight of the centers, which are being established by the ORT network with \$1.6 million in funding from U.S. philanthropists, will be operating within the next year, according to Gideon Meyer, deputy director general of the World ORT Union.

The project, called Regeneration 2000, marks a collaboration between those who wish to contribute to the ongoing Jewish renaissance in the former Soviet Union and those, particularly in Israel, who argue that Jews there should be encouraged to leave.

"There is no contradiction between helping those Jews who wish to leave as well as those Jews who see a future in these countries," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

The schools hope to enroll 10,000 students by the end of 2001, Meyer said.

"They won't come because it's a Jewish school. They come to a good school because it's a good school," he said.

Some 90 percent of the students in these schools are Jewish, according to Women's American ORT, the group's American arm. ORT currently operates four schools in the former Soviet Union. The organization, which was founded in Russia in 1880, also works with 22 other Jewish schools there. □

JEWISH WORLD

Postal worker gets settlement

A Jewish postal worker in California who suffered anti-Semitic harassment on the job received \$125,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

Though a federal regulator ruled in his favor last year, George Kaufman filed the lawsuit after the U.S. Postal Service refused to punish those responsible for the harassment and after he deemed a staff-wide sensitivity training program as meaningless.

German fund passes hurdle

The upper house of the German Parliament approved a bill that paves the way toward a \$4.6 billion fund to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers. U.S. and German officials hope to complete a deal by June 1, but German industry wants guarantees of immunity from future legal action in the United States.

Switzerland to pay siblings

Switzerland agreed to pay \$118,000 to a Jewish brother and sister whose parents were killed after they were kicked out of the country during World War II.

Switzerland said it would pay Charles and Sabine Sonabend in an out-of-court settlement, but stopped short of calling the payment "compensation" out of fear it would encourage other claims from Holocaust survivors.

S.F. federation head resigns

The executive director of San Francisco's Jewish federation is resigning, effective August.

Wayne Feinstein, 48, has worked in Jewish communal service for 27 years and told the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California that he is interested in starting his own business.

French Jewish sites defaced

Vandals defaced nine Jewish sites in the French city of Marseille last week.

Police tightened security after the attacks.

Moscow Shoah conference opens

A conference on the Holocaust sponsored by Sweden was scheduled to begin Monday in Moscow. The conference is an outgrowth of January's Holocaust educational conference in Stockholm.

Havel remembers Nazi victims

Those who were executed, deported and tortured in World War II must not be forgotten in the new millennium, Czech President Vaclav Havel said Sunday at the National Cemetery in Terezin.

Havel was speaking at a ceremony remembering Nazi victims from the former Terezin ghetto and the nearby Litomeric concentration camp.

Israel lobbyists run nylon campaign to win Congress' pantyhose support

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Pro-Israel groups in Washington have successfully stretched their lobbying efforts to protect the Israeli contribution to pantyhose.

As a result of last-minute lobbying by these groups, a provision designed specifically to protect imports of Israeli-made nylon yarn was added to a major U.S. trade bill with African and Caribbean countries that President Clinton signed May 18.

Imports to the United States of Israeli yarn, used mainly in the manufacture of pantyhose, total approximately \$50 million each year.

Without the provision, the new law, by extending trade benefits to sub-Saharan Africa and the states of the Caribbean Basin, would have superseded parts of the existing free trade agreement between the United States and Israel.

With the protection in place, an important precedent has been set: Future trade agreements between the United States and other countries will not harm Israel's trade relations with Washington.

When the bill was drafted, it stated that if a garment is sewn in the United States with U.S.-made yarn and then sent to the Caribbean to be assembled, the final product would receive duty-free treatment once the product returned to America for distribution.

But written that way, the law protects only yarn made exclusively in America, thereby harming Israeli yarn producers, Jewish groups noticed.

"There doesn't have to be a contradiction in the U.S. opening trade relations with new countries and the existing free trade relationship the U.S. has with Israel," said Jeffrey Colman, deputy legislative director for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League and B'nai B'rith worked to ensure that Israel would not be hurt by the new bill.

The provision to the bill says any country that had a free trade agreement before 1995 would not be subject to the U.S.-only yarn restriction. Israel signed a free trade agreement with the United States in 1985.

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), who support the protection for Israeli manufacturers, encountered some resistance in the House before they eventually succeeded in pushing the provision.

The African and Caribbean trade bill had been moving slowly through Congress for several years, and some were concerned that any additional amendments might harm passage of the bill. □

Reported radioactivity creates Belarus fallout

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and U.S. experts were slated to travel to Belarus to check the level of radioactivity in the region stemming from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986.

The Jewish Agency for Israel said it was ready to evacuate all Jews from Belarus because of fears of rising radioactivity in the area.

Belarus officials and Jewish sources say rumors of increased radioactivity, reportedly caused by a series of forest fires in neighboring Ukraine, are false.

"We expect that experts will arrive soon to assess the radioactivity situation," Diana Moxi, head of the information service at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, told the Reuters news service.

"In line with our data, based on our own checks, there is no danger. But we are not specialists."

The Israeli Embassy in Minsk and some Jewish organizations have evacuated their staff because of the reports.

Chernobyl was the site of the world's worst nuclear accident when a reactor caught fire and exploded in 1986, spewing radioactive dust over neighboring Russia, Belarus and much of the rest of Europe. □

ARTS & CULTURE

Italian singer uses his noodle in show about his Jewish roots

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — “Lokhshen” — noodles — is also the Yiddish word for spaghetti.

It is the name Italian singer and actor Enrico Fink has given a new stage production and CD based on his search for his own Eastern European Jewish roots.

The title is deliberately ironic.

“Lokhshen is how Jewish immigrants on New York’s Lower East Side used to call their neighbors in Little Italy,” says Fink, a tall, thin 31-year-old with a reddish beard and long reddish hair pulled back in a pony tail.

“But then, like many Yiddish words, lokhshen has another meaning, too,” he says.

“It means petty stories, anecdotes. And such may well be the story told in the show.”

Fink’s “Lokhshen” relates the saga of a Russian Jewish refugee who arrives in Italy in 1905.

He becomes the cantor at a synagogue in the Italian town of Ferrara, near Venice, before being deported to his death in the Holocaust along with most of his relatives.

Backed by three musicians, Fink uses narrative, song and poetry to tell the tale.

He employs klezmer tunes, Yiddish songs and Ferrara’s specific Jewish liturgical melodies.

He also uses the chilling poem “Gute Nakht Velt,” or “Goodnight, World,” by poet Yakov Glatstein, set to Fink’s original music, which was written in 1938.

That was the year Italy’s fascists introduced anti-Semitic racial laws.

Fink plays the role of Riccardo Rotstein, a young Italian Jew trying to reconstruct his great-grandfather’s life beginning with little information: his own name, a photograph depicting a 1930s Jewish wedding in Ferrara, a coat, a document certifying the arrest of the great-grandfather’s family in 1943.

Rotstein is a fictional character, but the outline and many of the details of his story are taken directly from Fink’s own family history.

“In many ways, it is totally autobiographical,” he told JTA recently.

“My great-grandfather, Benzion Fink, was born in a shtetl near Zhitomir in Ukraine, and he did become cantor in Ferrara. My great-grandmother came from a shtetl nearby.

“Before I had even had an inkling that this would become a show, I had spent many weeks doing research on the Eastern European side of my family, and my initial data were really small — name, photo, coat, document and a few other things, but not much.”

He chose the name “Rotstein” for the character he plays in “Lokhshen” in tribute to famed Jewish writer Giorgio Bassani, whose books, including “The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,” recounted the world of Ferrara’s Jews.

That book was later made into an Oscar-winning movie.

Bassani, who died just before Passover at the age of 84, was a close friend of Fink’s family and based fictional characters

named Rotstein on family members.

His own interest in family history, Fink says, came at a turning point in his life.

“Even though my mother is not Jewish, Judaism was always the reference religion in the family,” he said.

“Since I was a child, I would go to the synagogue for Yom Kippur, participate in an occasional seder. My mother would sometimes organize a seder for Jewish friends passing by on Passover.

“I considered myself pretty much a non-religious Jew, but a Jew nonetheless.

“What left the strongest mark on my imagination, though, was the unspeakable memory of the Shoah,” he said.

“My father’s family was utterly destroyed during the war,” he said.

“My father and his mother survived, but almost the whole of the rest of the family was taken — 12 people in all of my father’s close family died in Auschwitz.

“So when my father’s mother died in 1994, and I felt the last strands of that memory dying with her, I could not help but start collecting all I could of that story,” he said.

“It was at first only a very personal effort; but I have always known that I would want to bear testimony in some way, sooner or later.”

Fink, whose father, Guido, is a well-known Italian Jewish writer and critic who today is director of the Italian Culture Institute in Los Angeles, began singing Jewish and Yiddish songs in the mid-1990s.

He was part of a wave of interest in Jewish culture, among Jews and non-Jews alike, that has developed in recent years in Italy and other European countries.

“I regarded it at first as an interesting experience, one of the many I was going through in my struggle to become a professional singer,” he said.

The other three members of his group include two Italians and a young Israeli.

“We played klezmer and liturgical music, at festivals throughout Italy,” said Fink.

“But we decided not to record since, well, what could be the interest in klezmer played by lokhshen such as ourselves?”

“But eventually, our specific viewpoint as Italians and Europeans started to seem relevant; and the story of my great-grandfather sprang to mind as a perfect means through which to tell our story,” he said.

Fink’s performances are directed at both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

Both the stage show and the CD, which includes the entire text and music, have received wide coverage in major Italian publications and on television.

“Lokhshen” is intended for “an Italian audience, which does not know much about Eastern European Judaism, but has recently begun to hear a lot of klezmer in cinema, TV shows and CDs,” he said. “So I use that material but I also tend to be ironic about it being hip and so on.

“Usually, Jewish audiences are somewhat diffident at first, because they rightly prefer to hear something that relates more to Italian Judaism,” he said.

“But when they hear the show, the reaction is — by what I can gauge — very positive, and often very much moved.” □