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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Peres, Katsav to run for president

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres will be the Labor Party's candidate for president. A former tourism minister, Moshe Katsav, will be the Likud Party's candidate. The current president, Ezer Weizman, announced this week that he will resign in July, three years before his second five-year term ends.

Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg said the Knesset will vote by secret ballot on July 31.

Lawyer: 'Iran 13' should be freed

Iran has no "just" choice but to free the 13 Jews facing trial on accusations of spying for Israel, the defendants' lead lawyer said Monday.

His comments to reporters came after the 10 main defendants appeared in court for what may be their last closed-door hearing. Three other defendants remain free on bail and did not have to appear in court.

Tensions ease on border

The Fatma crossing between Israel and Lebanon was quiet Monday as the Lebanese army and Hezbollah set up roadblocks preventing civilians from reaching the area.

The previous day, at least three Lebanese civilians were lightly hurt when Israeli troops fired warning shots to push back demonstrators attempting to enter Israeli territory. [Page 1]

Israel seeks review of Wall ruling

Israel's Justice Ministry plans to ask the Supreme Court to reconsider its ruling allowing Jewish women to hold non-Orthodox prayer services at the Western Wall. A "petition will be presented in the coming week," the ministry said Monday.

Last week's decision by the court was blasted by the fervently Orthodox community, and Israeli officials have warned of possible violence.

Arson guts Philadelphia shul

A fire set by arsonists destroyed a Philadelphia synagogue. Police said the fire had been set at Beit-Harambam Congregation early Saturday morning by one person who broke in through a back window.

The fire destroyed Torahs and prayer books, gutted the synagogue's interior and left some 300 congregants without a house of worship.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

An eerie quiet descends on northern Israeli towns

By Gil Sedan

METULLA, Israel (JTA) — When Israel ordered its troop withdrawal from Lebanon, government officials did not take into account the fact that cherries and apricots were ripening early this year.

But the farmers here in northern Israel were all too aware that they needed hands to help them with the harvest.

They were also painfully aware that they could no longer count on the help of workers from southern Lebanon, many of whom disappeared during the Israel Defense Force's hectic withdrawal last week.

The farmers cannot depend on unemployed Israelis from neighboring Kiryat Shmona, accusing them of preferring to receive unemployment benefits rather than work in the orchards.

So the farmers were learning the hard way how totally dependent they are on foreign workers.

"I now have only two Thais, two Chinese and two Mongolians. I just cannot cope," said Ehud Neustein, 60, a resident of the northern town of Metulla.

Escorted by his newly recruited Mongolian workers, Neustein went down to his apricot and cherry orchards, which had turned overnight into a front line.

Streams of Lebanese cars could be seen jamming the road across the border fence, located just a few yards from the orchard.

In some parts of town, the border with Lebanon was totally open.

Theoretically, Hezbollah fighters could simply walk across the street into Israel. And some did just that.

They broke down the fence and placed Hezbollah flags on the Israeli side of the border, chanting, "We will continue all the way to Jerusalem."

The army had torn down the former border fence, but a new, more sophisticated electronic fence had not yet been erected.

Everyone had thought there was plenty of time left before Israel would withdraw its troops from Lebanon — a move that was completed, taking many by surprise, on May 24.

As a result, long sections along the border remained relatively open for infiltrators. It was not until Sunday that the defense ministry gave the go-ahead for intensive construction of a new border fence.

"It's not that I am afraid," said Yair Neustein, 16, Ehud's son. "But I know that I should be afraid. Imagine that I am going with the tractor to the orchard, and suddenly I face a Hezbollah fighter. What do I do then?"

On Monday, Israel distributed weapons to residents of the northern communities.

The move came as tensions lessened on Israel's northern border with Lebanon following violence along the frontier over the weekend.

The Fatma crossing, scene of demonstrations and rock-throwing by Lebanese civilians and armed Hezbollah members in recent days, was quiet Monday as the Lebanese army and Hezbollah set up roadblocks preventing civilians from reaching the area. The previous day, at least three Lebanese civilians were lightly hurt when Israeli troops fired warning shots to push back demonstrators attempting to enter Israeli territory.

Now, despite the relative quiet, the situation is still considered highly fragile, and

MIDEAST FOCUS

Mordechai resigns from Cabinet

Israeli Transportation Minister Yitzhak Mordechai resigned from the Cabinet, but he will continue to serve as a Knesset member. Sunday's resignation followed the attorney general's decision to charge him on three counts of sexual abuse involving three women over a period of eight years.

Settler leader warns Barak

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak risks being assassinated if he uproots Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a leader of a settler group said.

If Barak carries "out this dangerous plan, his days could be numbered," Shlomo Riklin said in a radio interview. Riklin is a leader of Second Generation, a group of young settlers who have set up outposts on West Bank hilltops to prevent land transfers to the Palestinians.

Haredim blamed for fire

The Conservative movement is blaming fervently Orthodox Jews for attempting to burn down the front door of a Conservative synagogue in Jerusalem.

"It is inconceivable to think of such desecration being perpetrated by Jews in the Jewish homeland," the Conservative movement said. Last year the Ya'ar Ramot Synagogue, in an area with a large fervently Orthodox population, was sprayed with graffiti promising to "turn your Purim into Tisha B'Av."

Lesbian couple wins court case

An Israeli lesbian couple won the right Monday to be registered as the mothers of a son born to one of them through a sperm donor.

In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court on Monday ordered the Interior Ministry to register Nicole Brener Kadish as an adoptive mother to Matan, the 4-year-old son of her lesbian partner, Ruthy Brener Kadish.



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people are not making predictions. Last week, just before the IDF staged its dramatic pullout from Lebanon, Zehava Neustein of Metulla feared the worst. "All hell broke loose. Everyone was shooting at everyone. One boom followed another," she said.

The eerie quiet that descended this week was a pleasant surprise.

"It is almost hard to get used to the quiet," said Meir Shaked, 41, of Kibbutz Adamit on the western section of the border with Lebanon. "For the first time in years, there are no helicopters in the sky and no sounds of shelling."

But while he and numerous other northern residents praised the withdrawal, there were many who fear what the future will hold. And these fears center on economic issues — in some cases, more than on concerns for security.

In recent days, the residents of Adamit have had to deal with just such fears.

Adamit is a small kibbutz of 38 members, located on a cliff in the Upper Galilee. With a magnificent view of the Gulf of Haifa, it is one of the more beautiful spots in Israel. But it is a kibbutz struggling for its life. Not because of Hezbollah, but because it can no longer pay its debts.

"We were hoping that being a border settlement, facing Hezbollah, the government would show some understanding," said Shaked. But so far, he added, there has been nothing.

On a recent day, when hundreds of Hezbollah grenades fell in the vicinity of the kibbutz, the Mekorot water company cut off the water supply to Adamit.

Why? "Because we were behind paying our water bill," said Shaked.

Voicing a concern shared by many other Israelis in the region, he added, "The scariest Katyusha rocket in the world does not frighten me half as much as the fear that one day I will find my bank account closed."

The economically weak kibbutzim and moshavim along the border fear that they will not hold out because of their economic burdens. They maintain that there is a wide gap between the government's statements about being committed to helping the northern settlements, and its actions to help the settlements keep their heads above water.

Meanwhile, Yair Neustein is convinced that it is only a matter of time until the IDF will be forced back into Lebanon. In fact, he is disappointed that when he joins the army in two years, he will not be able to serve in Lebanon.

"I wanted to serve in Lebanon. I wanted to be there, to defend my home, not to stand on top of an observation post, not doing anything."

But people like Yair are an exception. After several days of tense quiet along the border, there was an air of cautious — very cautious — optimism that Israel would not have to return to Lebanon. □

Argentine president fetes survivors and apologizes for his nation's past

By Nicolas Penchaszadeh

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — For 24 Holocaust survivors, their meeting with Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa was a unique moment.

"It gave me life. It made me feel real, authentic," said Hanka Waserman, a survivor from Poland who has lived in Argentina for half a century.

"I could never have imagined a moment like this," said Iashe Esterman, a survivor from Ukraine.

The survivors, all residents of Argentina, met de la Rúa, his family, and the nation's Cabinet members for lunch May 24 at Government House. Also present were Jewish communal leaders and Israel's ambassador to Argentina, Yitzhak Aviran.

During the lunch, de la Rúa apologized for the nation's postwar harboring of Nazi war criminals. "In Argentina you have our utmost respect," he told the survivors, who were received with full honors, with the nation's ceremonial Grenadiers standing guard.

De la Rúa personally gave each of the survivors a Presidential Medal.

"Through the survivors, de la Rúa's gesture was a tribute to all Holocaust victims," said David Fleischer, president of the Holocaust Memory Foundation.

"The survivors' lives in this country were strengthened by this gesture." □

JEWISH WORLD

Groups help Lebanese refugees

The American Jewish Committee donated \$10,000 to provide humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese refugees who found asylum in the Jewish state after last week's Israeli troop withdrawal from Lebanon.

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is mobilizing a relief effort for the refugees. The group says it was contacted by the Israeli government to collect toiletries, clothing and shoes.

Vandals attack Athens cemetery

Greece condemned an attack by vandals on the main Jewish cemetery in Athens. "This vandalism will not go unanswered," a government spokesman said, adding that the act had "enraged" Greek officials.

Vandals attacked the cemetery last Friday, painting Nazi slogans and symbols on its Holocaust memorial as well as on dozens of graves.

Denier blasts 'protection money'

Austria's planned payments to Nazi-era slave laborers are "nothing other" than "protection money" needed to maintain good relations with the United States, a member of the far-right Freedom Party was quoted as saying. "We are in a situation in which we have to knuckle under to the great powers," legislator John Gudenus told Profil magazine. In 1995, Gudenus said the existence of Nazi gas chambers was "dogma" rather than established historical fact.

Neo-Nazis march in Germany

Some 4,000 neo-Nazis and skinheads from Germany's extremist National Democratic Party marched Saturday through the Bavarian town of Passau shouting right-wing slogans. A police spokesman said 50 people were arrested, most of them left-wing activists staging a counterdemonstration.

Moscow mayor lauds Israeli ties

Israeli businessmen have "woken up" to the benefits of working with their Russian counterparts, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov said at a high-profile international investment forum. Officials with the Israeli-Russian Chamber of Commerce estimate that Israeli entrepreneurs will invest some \$500 million to \$800 million in Moscow projects in the near future.

Grant to help Shoah rescuers

A Swiss fund for needy Holocaust survivors plans to make a \$2 million grant to support Christians and Muslims who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

The grant, to be announced Tuesday, is being made to the New York-based Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, which currently provides financial support to more than 1,700 rescuers in 30 countries.

Documents indicate WWII pope was informed of Nazi atrocities

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Documents recently unearthed in a Rome flea market show that the pope during World War II received regular reports on Nazi atrocities and must have known of the attempt to exterminate the Jews.

The finding is particularly significant because the issue of what Pope Pius XII did or didn't know during the Holocaust, and whether he could have done more to save Jews, has become a heated question in recent years.

The Vatican hierarchy, including Pope John Paul II, defends Pius and a process aimed at beatifying him is under way. The beatification process is the last step before someone is made a saint.

Father Pierre Blet, a Jesuit historian who has been particularly vocal in defending Pius, said he was astonished by the discovery of the documents.

The issue of what the wartime pope knew about the Holocaust surfaced again after Fabrizio Coisson, a reporter for Italy's news magazine Panorama, found in the flea market four binders full of typewritten summaries of wartime Allied radio broadcasts.

The summaries had been prepared by Sir Francis D'Arcy Godolphin Osborne, Britain's wartime ambassador to the Holy See.

"At first sight, they just looked like summaries of war news," Coisson wrote in a lengthy article on his find in Panorama.

But, he added, a handwritten note said they were copies of transcriptions of the BBC War News Services, made by Osborne and "transmitted every two days to the pope."

Osborne, who took up his post as ambassador in 1936, began his reports in September 1940, three months after he, like other ambassadors, took refuge behind Vatican walls when Italy joined the war as Nazi Germany's ally.

According to Coisson, the documents contain a number of direct references to the Nazi deportations, mass executions and other persecution of the Jews.

The earliest mention of Jews, in October 1940, warns that the Germans were "actively promoting anti-Semitism in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria."

More dramatic information appears later, particularly after Pius' Christmas homily in 1942, in which the pope condemned persecution in a general way, but without uttering the words "Nazi" or "Jew."

In January 1943, Osborne wrote: "In Slovakia, 77 percent of the Jewish population has been deported to an unknown destination, which probably signifies death."

Two weeks later, he wrote that "the number of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto has been reduced from 400,000 — there are barely 35,000 left."

The transcripts also detail reports of Nazi "atrocities in the name of the myth of the superior race," such as the use of poison gas against the handicapped — news that Osborne wrote he found difficult to believe.

According to Coisson, Osborne indeed exhibited "a sense of incredulity, almost a fear that [such] news without proof could be the fruit of propagandistic exaggeration."

It was previously known that Osborne had compiled radio summary reports during the war, but scholars had not found the documents.

Osborne continued to live in Rome after the war until his death in 1964, but there was no indication of how the documents had ended up at Porta Portese, Rome's sprawling main flea market.

The role Pius XII did, or should have, played during the war has been debated considerably in recent years.

The Roman Catholic Church has maintained that had the pope strongly condemned Nazi atrocities, it would have invited even worse reprisals.

In an interview earlier this year, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the papal representative in the Holy Land, strongly defended Pius XII, repeating the Vatican's stance that Pius saved Jews by remaining silent.

"I am convinced that a great strong condemnation would have increased the persecution of Hitler against the Jews," Sambi said. □

Young lawyer says career harmed by sexual, anti-Jewish harassment

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Kissandra Cohen had everything going for her.

Possessing a sky-high IQ, Cohen had finished law school by the age of 20 and was heading toward an MBA degree.

But today, Cohen is out of a job, can't get a new one and has filed a voluminous lawsuit against the law firm made famous in the film "Erin Brockovich."

In it, she details what she claims are incidents of anti-Jewish discrimination and sexual harassment.

Early last year, while still at Loyola Law School, Cohen was hired as a law clerk by the firm of Masry & Vititoe in Westlake Village, near Los Angeles.

In September, while the results of her bar examination were still out, partner Edward Masry raised her salary to \$120,000 a year and sweetened the pot with a "fully loaded" 1998 Ford Explorer, a top-of-the-line cell phone and other benefits.

Masry enthusiastically described the state's youngest lawyer as "brilliant," adding, "I wouldn't hesitate to give her any file in our office. I predict in 10 years she'll be one of the premier trial attorneys in California."

Cohen's lawsuit, though laced with graphic language and descriptions of a workplace rampant with sexism, might have gone unnoticed by the media, but for the fact that the hit movie "Erin Brockovich" opened on the country's movie screens about the same time.

Based on an actual case, the film depicts Brockovich getting her teeth into a case that accused Pacific Gas & Electric of polluting the ground water near its plant in Hinkley, Calif., allegedly causing severe physical harm to some 600 residents.

Masry and Brockovich, working as a team, won a judgment in 1996 of \$333 million, the largest penalty ever assessed in a non-jury trial.

The real Brockovich has continued to work at the law firm and is now its director of environmental research and investigation.

The relationship between Masry and Brockovich plays a role in the two current opposing lawsuits — Masry has filed his own lawsuit accusing Cohen of slander — and adds to the case's complexity.

Cohen charges that during her 11 months at the law firm she was subject to constant groping, pinching, nuzzling, verbal innuendoes, obscene language and other forms of sexual harassment by Masry.

Cohen cited more than 20 specific incidents.

The 21-year-old Cohen presents a picture of the 67-year-old Masry as a man fixated on female breasts and who hired and paid women employees, including a Playboy model, for their looks and other physical endowments.

In addition, Cohen filed charges of 10 counts of sexual harassment against two other lawyers in the firm.

At one point in her brief, Cohen says that "Brockovich and others had implied (to Cohen) or claimed outright at various times that Masry and Brockovich had had a sexual relationship."

Masry and Brockovich deny the allegation and have filed a slander suit against Cohen.

Cohen's second set of charges deals with religious discrimination. She claims that at Masry's insistence, she was forced to attend a series of Friday evening sessions at the law office, despite her plea for a change of dates so that she could celebrate the Sabbath with her family.

In separate interviews, Masry said that there were only two such meetings, and that in both Cohen left around 6 p.m. However, Cohen responded that there were close to a dozen meetings, generally lasting until 10:30 p.m.

Another complaint by Cohen revolves around a graduation issue published last June by the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, which pictured her on the cover. Cohen charges that James Joseph Brown III, a fellow lawyer at the firm, took the cover page and inscribed it with such remarks as "Jewish Princess," "Cool and Kosher!! No pork on those gams!!!" and "But she looks real good in a *SKIRT*, hence our cover girl this year."

Cohen said she went to Masry a number of times to complain about the cover and Brown's attitude, but that Masry laughed it off. Masry maintains that he never saw the defaced cover until later, when the pleadings in Cohen's lawsuit were filed.

Cohen also charges that Brown, in addition to sexually harassing her, frequently called her a "JAP" (Jewish American Princess). In another incident, she says, Brown pointed to a Star of David that Cohen wore around her neck, commenting "in a disparaging tone, 'Why do you have to wear a Jewish star? Are you proud of being a Jew?'"

Brown maintains that he was Cohen's best friend at the office and meant his inscriptions on the cover picture "as a joke."

He denies that he sexually harassed Cohen, called her a "JAP" or made comments about her Star of David. Brown says that after he left the law firm in October, Cohen retained him to represent a member of her family in a legal matter.

Both Masry and Cohen say that after several months of such friction, he phoned her on Dec. 26 and fired her. But the reason is in dispute.

According to Cohen, Masry called her at home and asked her to come to the office. She told him she was caught up on her work and he responded that he didn't need her for work but wanted to see her. She declined and within the hour, Masry called again and told Cohen she was fired.

Masry labels Cohen's version an "unequivocal lie" and said he fired her because she put in too few hours of work at the office, antagonized other employees, and, though she was paid an attorney's salary, she had failed to clear the paperwork with the California bar that would permit her to practice as an attorney.

Cohen, in turn, describes this version as a lie.

Since her termination, Cohen has applied for positions at several other law firms, but has not been hired because, she says, Masry will not give her a letter of reference.

Masry asserts that what incenses him most about Cohen's lawsuit is the implication that he discriminated against her because she is Jewish.

He said he has assembled 60 witnesses to rebut Cohen's allegations, and many of the key ones are Jewish.

In addition, he said, "My father was a Christian from Syria, who came to the United States in 1912 because of repression in his native country.

"He was one of the first to give money to Israel in 1948. His sympathies were pro-Zionist, not pro-Arab." □