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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Negotiators said to be far apart

The Israeli and Palestinian negotiating positions at Camp David remain far apart, according to Israel's foreign minister.

Speaking after a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, David Levy said earlier statements made by Palestinian officials that the two sides were making progress are "baseless."

Jewish settlers held a mass rally Sunday in Tel Aviv to protest any concessions Barak may make to the Palestinians at the summit.

Over the weekend, Israelis supporting Barak's peace efforts formed a convoy of cars traveling from Tel Aviv to Haifa.

In another development, Jewish settlers and Palestinians traded curses and blows during a second day of clashes in the West Bank town of Hebron. **[Page 3]**

British group gets new leader

The umbrella organization that represents most British Jews elected its first woman president in its 240-year history.

Jo Wagerman, a former senior vice president of the Board of Deputies, ran unopposed for a three-year term.

Religion bill goes to Senate

Legislation requiring state and local governments to provide compelling reasons for passing zoning laws that block religious institutions was introduced in the Senate.

The Religious Land-Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which has the support of many Jewish organizations, is a more limited version of the Religious Liberties Protection Act, which failed last year.

Five programs get backing

An effort to make Jewish life more inclusive to the deaf and a partnership to strengthen community service programs in Jewish day high schools in the United States are among five initiatives selected for a new national incubator project.

Hoping to foster innovative projects and organizations in the Jewish community, the United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Education Service of North America are providing two years of office space, administrative support and mentoring for the projects.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Six years after deadly terror attack, many questions remain in Argentina

By Carina Miller

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — In the cold morning air, the loud, mournful calls of four shofars sounded in front of the federal courthouse.

"The ancient sound of the shofar used to rally the people to listen," Enrique Burbinsky told a few dozen people last week. "Today it rallies the people to demand" justice.

Burbinsky is a member and spokesman for Memoria Activa, the organization formed after the July 18, 1994, car bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center that killed 86 people and wounded some 300 others.

Every Monday morning at 9:53, the time of the bombing here in the Argentine capital, relatives of the victims and a handful of leaders from various Jewish groups gather in front of the courthouse to seek justice.

Six years after the bombing of the center, long the heart of Jewish life here, the Argentine government has failed to find those responsible for the attack.

The 1992 car bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, an attack that killed 29 people and left 200 wounded, has likewise gone unsolved.

A handful of individuals — including members of the Buenos Aires provincial police force — have been indicted as participants in the AMIA bombing, but their role was primarily in providing the vehicle used for the attack.

The link between the alleged foreign masterminds and the local people who carried out the bombing has yet to be determined, although strong evidence points to the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires.

The case has been plagued with so many gross irregularities — including the disappearance of key evidence and disobedience of the investigating judge's orders by government officials and the police — that some 50 separate cases have been opened to address them.

Memoria Activa has also presented a claim before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, an international human rights body, to create some international pressure to speed up the investigation.

Burbinsky and other Jewish leaders charge that the lack of progress in the case is a direct result of the government's lack of political will and the prosecution's complacency.

Sergio Widder, representative of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Latin America and a member of Memoria Activa's board, is among those who feel that given the lack of many proper criminal investigations in Argentina, there was no reason to expect anything different in this case.

Just the same, the magnitude of the crime and the nature of Argentina's foreign policy at the time of the bombing suggest that Argentina had ample reason to treat this case differently.

Perhaps most important in this regard, the administration of then-President Carlos Menem prided itself on having established excellent relations with Israel, the United States and the American Jewish community.

Although Argentina received help from foreign governments, especially at the early stages of the investigation, that help mostly addressed the international aspects of the terrorist attack.

The Mossad, CIA and FBI contributed information and technical expertise that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Iran missile test sparks concern

Israeli officials voiced concern after Iran successfully fired a medium-range missile.

The Israel Defense Force's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, told Israel Radio on Sunday that the Shahab 3 Missile poses a threat not only to Israel, but to any other country within its 800-mile range.

Albright, Palestinians confer

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with leftist Palestinian leaders advising Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat at the Camp David peace talks with Israel. One of the three leftists who flew in to see Arafat, Tayseer Khaled of the radical Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, refused to meet Albright because he said the United States is interfering in Palestinian affairs.

Report: Militants training in Iran

Hamas militants from the Gaza Strip have been undergoing military training in Iran, including learning how to fire missiles and detonate explosives, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday. The paper said a Hamas militant disclosed the information after being arrested by Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service.

Draft sought for Israeli Arabs

The right-wing Israel, Our Home Party recently introduced a Knesset bill calling for the compulsory draft of Israeli Arabs. They are currently exempt from Israel's mandatory army draft and are not required to complete an alternate national service program.

Israel sends help to Greece

Israel dispatched a plane, two helicopters and some 50 people to help Greece combat fires that have broken out in a heat wave engulfing the region.

The Israeli helicopters are equipped with navigation systems that enable the firefighting teams to work at night.

incriminated Iran and Hezbollah. Yet foreign governments did little beyond occasional statements to press local officials to find out the details of the "local connection," even as the number of serious irregularities in the investigation mounted.

Explanations for the lack of foreign pressure vary.

For one, U.S. officials may not have wanted to spoil their good relations with Argentina, which had aligned itself firmly with the United States on most foreign policy fronts.

The Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires acknowledges that Argentine-Israeli relations at both the commercial and political levels were negatively affected by the embassy and AMIA bombings. Yet Israel also reaffirms its interest in maintaining good relations with Argentina.

Further, according to the embassy, the Argentine Jewish community expected too much from the Mossad, Israel's spy agency, which did not have the capacity or expertise to get involved in an investigation dealing with the "local connection."

Laura Ginsberg, an active member of Memoria Activa whose husband was killed in the bombing, feels that there could have been more foreign pressure.

But, she said, "It is extremely hard to convince foreign governments that the state's security apparatus may be an accomplice in an act of this nature."

Rogelio Cichowolsky, president of DAIA, an umbrella group of Jewish organizations in Argentina, believes it likely that foreign intelligence services have some information but have declined to share it with Argentine officials.

This is because of the "perception that there is a lack of professionalism or rigor in the investigative work of the local intelligence services" and a "lack of certainty that any information will be used appropriately," he said.

Some, like Cichowolsky, believe that new evidence and new witnesses will emerge during the upcoming trial of those who have been indicted.

While Cichowolsky decries the many pitfalls in the investigation, he does not question the courts' good faith the way Memoria Activa does — and this has put him and other AMIA and DAIA leaders at odds with Memoria Activa and many other members of the Jewish community.

At the risk of being deemed complacent by Memoria Activa, Cichowolsky expressed his preference for working persistently and avoiding incendiary remarks.

On Monday, Memoria Activa will meet for the 311th consecutive week to demand justice and to hold a special memorial service commemorating the sixth anniversary of the bombing.

As they have done so many times before, its members will likely condemn the course of the investigation, challenge the new administration of President Fernando de la Rúa to show the political will that its predecessor lacked, and express their fears that a trial of the few already indicted will put an end to the case with a few half-truths.

They will also likely express their disagreement with the AMIA/DAIA leadership in strong terms.

Pointedly, this rally by Memoria Activa is separate from the one organized by AMIA and DAIA for Tuesday morning — the actual anniversary of the bombing — which will be attended by a group of victims' relatives who have preferred to work within the AMIA/DAIA framework.

It is one of the many sad truths of the AMIA case that it not only destroyed families, but further divided a community that was already undergoing an economic crisis and a crisis of leadership. □

Italy's Jews launch campaign

ROME (JTA) — Italian Jews have begun a letter and fax campaign to force the city of Bari to change the name of a street honoring a key promoter of Fascist-era anti-Semitism.

Nicola Pende was an eminent pathologist who headed a list of scientists in signing a 1938 manifesto of racist scientists that "proved" Italians to be "Aryans" and paved the way for harsh anti-Semitic laws issued later that year.

Last month, after a similar campaign, municipal authorities in the southern town of Pesche decided not to name a street in Pende's honor. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Hillary calls accusation a 'lie'

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton described as "an outrageous lie" a new book's claim that she called an aide to her husband a "Jew bastard" after Bill Clinton's unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1974.

"I have spent a lifetime devoted to increasing tolerance. This never happened," the first lady said.

Signing planned for slave fund

German and U.S. negotiators plan to meet Monday in Berlin to sign an accord creating a \$5.2 billion fund for Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

Some 240,000 slave laborers, about 140,000 of whom are Jewish, are expected to receive as much as \$7,500 each from the fund.

More than 1 million forced laborers will get up to \$2,500 each.

Jewish group helps flood victims

A Jewish organization committed to natural disaster cleanup is assisting flood victims in Eagan, Minn.

The five-year-old Nechama project, established by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, is helping to clean basements and haul out debris after more than 8 inches of rain submerged parts of a Minneapolis-St. Paul suburb.

Nazi suspect's lawsuit dismissed

A U.S. federal judge dismissed a Nazi suspect's lawsuit that claimed the probe into allegations that he was a war criminal amounted to torture.

John Demjanjuk had sought at least \$5 million from the Justice Department and its Nazi-hunting Office of Special Investigations.

Lawyer joins O.U. probe

A lawyer who was on the team that investigated the Iran-contra affair in the 1980s will join an independent commission examining the Orthodox Union.

Bruce Yannett will help investigate charges that O.U. officials repeatedly ignored complaints that a top professional in the youth arm, Rabbi Baruch Lanner, was molesting, abusing and sexually harassing teenagers.

Issuer of Shoah warning dies

Jan Karski, who traveled from Nazi-occupied Poland to London to tell a skeptical West about the Holocaust, died at the age of 86. Karski, a courier for Poland's underground Home Army, witnessed the mass murder of Jews during World War II. But when he reached the West, his stories were not believed. A top U.S. judge told him, "I am not saying you are lying, but I don't believe you."

Left, right make their voices heard as Israelis fight war of public opinion

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the Camp David negotiations proceed amid a media blackout, left- and right-wing activists here have been mobilizing to convey their stances about the summit.

Jewish settlers and their supporters held a mass rally Sunday in Tel Aviv to protest any concessions Prime Minister Ehud Barak may make to the Palestinians at the summit. Some 1,500 police officers were stationed in the area to secure the event, which drew an estimated tens of thousands.

On the other side of the political divide, Israelis supporting Barak's peace efforts formed a convoy of cars traveling over the weekend from Tel Aviv to Haifa.

Activists from the left and right were posted at major intersections in Israel over the weekend, handing out bumper stickers and bearing banners with their respective messages.

In the West Bank town of Hebron, scene of frequent clashes over the years, divisions between Jewish settlers and Palestinians erupted Sunday into curses and blows during the second day of clashes there. At least one person was hospitalized.

Settlers said the fighting began a day earlier when a Palestinian attempted to sexually assault a 14-year-old Jewish girl. Palestinian officials denied the charge, calling it a pretext by settlers hoping to see the Camp David summit fail.

In another development involving settlers Sunday, Israeli police dragged away dozens of young Jewish settlers from a West Bank hilltop where they had erected a tent to protest the Camp David summit.

Organizers of the protest, many of them in their teens, said their action was taken independently of the mainstream Yesha Council, which represents settlers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

That same day in Jerusalem, right-wing Israeli political leaders met at the urging of Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert to come up with a strategy to counter what they claim is Barak's willingness to divide the city. President Clinton "must understand that the majority of the people of Israel are congregated here, against the division of Jerusalem," said Shas leader Eli Yishai. "This message must go directly to Camp David, the prime minister and the members of the delegations."

Likud Knesset member Danny Naveh told Israel Radio that Barak's declaration that he would never abandon the idea of a united Jerusalem at Camp David is misleading.

"What he does not tell the public is his plan to transfer certain [Arab] neighborhoods within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries to Palestinian municipal control," said Naveh, who claimed that this would "begin a process of division of the city."

These claims were rejected by Cabinet minister Haim Ramon.

"The prime minister has no intention of dividing Jerusalem. There is an absolute commitment that Jerusalem will remain united under Israeli sovereignty," Ramon told Israel Radio. "I am convinced that this red line will not be crossed."

Because of the virtual news blackout imposed by the American hosts on the talks, little has been revealed so far about the substance of the discussions, which must address the most difficult issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, including Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, final borders and Jewish settlements.

The Israeli media were busy trying to read the tea leaves after Barak telephoned several leading politicians to brief them on the summit's progress.

According to Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating positions at Camp David remain far apart.

Speaking after a telephone conversation with Barak, Levy said earlier statements made by Palestinian officials that the two sides were making progress are "baseless."

Barak also briefed Ramon, who confirmed reports that the discussions have been difficult. "What I can say is that it is no picnic," he said.

However, Ramon repeated his view that if the two sides are able to agree to put off dealing with the contentious issue of Jerusalem, the chances of reaching an agreement are good. □

Hebrew teacher in Brazil insists he's innocent in child-porn case

By Shirley Nigri

RIO DE JANEIRO (JTA) — A Hebrew teacher jailed here on charges of engaging in child pornography is maintaining his innocence.

In a jailhouse interview with JTA, George Steinberg said he had no idea that a 17-year-old girl who turned him in was underage. He assumed she was older than 18, he said, because she worked at a night club.

The case sparked a furor in Brazil after an Israeli diplomat, Arie Scher, was also accused of involvement. Scher, who served the Israeli government in China for two years before coming to Rio de Janeiro, was subsequently recalled to the Jewish state, where officials are investigating the matter.

Police searched Steinberg's home earlier this month after the girl — identified only by the initial M. — accused Steinberg, 40, of taking a nude photo of her and posting it on an Internet site.

According to reports at the time, Steinberg implicated Scher after police found pornographic videos and more than 100 pictures of young girls in compromising positions at Steinberg's house. The pictures of nude teen-age girls were allegedly taken at Scher's apartment.

During the interview, Steinberg said he never implicated Scher.

"M. did it," Steinberg told JTA, adding that Scher, too, is innocent.

"Arie is a good fellow. He was doing a good job as a consul and he asked millions of times" to make sure the photographed girls were not underage.

Steinberg admitted that one of the pictures had been taken at Scher's pool and that another was taken atop the diplomat's car.

But he said the subject of the photo had shown him a document proving her age and that she had been photographed with her mother's permission.

Steinberg denied M.'s accusation that he had posted her nude photo on the Internet.

"She saw herself on my computer monitor, but I was not connected to the Internet. I know how to use Internet only to receive e-mail, and M. doesn't know how to open a site."

Steinberg claimed that M.'s accusations were a simple case of revenge.

"She used to come home drunk, and when I sent her away she got angry and wanted the pictures back."

Steinberg said Scher was right to return to Israel rather than face the Brazilian justice system.

"Arie is right not to remain in Brazil," he said. "The way things are conducted here, no one can rely on justice in Brazil. There are people here in prison for two years without having seen a judge."

Steinberg, who said the police had accused him of a crime without having any proof, said, "I just want to get out of prison."

"If it wasn't for the great media exposure, I would be already out," he said. "But the media inflate the case because it involves a diplomat, and they distort my words."

Steinberg said he hopes to be able to return to teaching "because I did nothing bad." □

Britain's first female Jewish leader pledges better outreach, tolerance

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — The first woman elected leader of the umbrella organization that represents most British Jews plans to reach out to young, unaffiliated Jews.

The failure to attract young people is "not just a problem in the Jewish community," said Jo Wagerman.

"Young people are either abandoning their culture or becoming fundamentalists" in Christian, Muslim and Sikh communities as well as among Jews, she said.

On Sunday, the Board of Deputies elected Wagerman the first woman president in its 240-year history.

A former senior vice president of the board, Wagerman was elected unopposed for a three-year term.

She said she was "delighted" that no one ran against her.

"I take that as a great compliment," she said.

Wagerman made little of being the first woman elected to the position, other than to say it marked the "end of the era in which all Jewish women could do was make the tea."

"It's not that I am leading the army" of women, she said. "It's just that the tide is going in that direction."

Approximately 55 percent of Britain's 283,000 Jews are women.

Wagerman emphasized that she wanted to be president of an inclusive organization.

Members of the fervently Orthodox community are not represented on the board, nor are Jews who are not affiliated with a synagogue.

According to some estimates, those two groups make up nearly 40 percent of British Jewry.

A recent study by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, a British think tank, called for the creation of a more representative, more inclusive structure to represent British Jewry.

Many saw that study's final report, "A Community of Communities," as an implicit critique of the board.

"We are the most representative thing we've got," Wagerman said in defense of the board.

"The only groups not represented are those which do not wish to be, or are oligarchic rather than democratic."

Wagerman said she planned to preside over an organization that was able to overcome rivalries and differences.

"We are not homogenous. We are always going to be different," she said of Britain's Jews.

"That should not prevent us from working together," Wagerman said.

"If we preach respect to others, we have to practice it at home," she said, admitting that "there have been occasions in the past when those crying loudest for tolerance have been slow to give it themselves."

Wagerman stressed the importance of Britain's various Jewish organizations working together.

"In the past, organizations have been a little bit territorial. We must stop thinking in terms of 'my territory, your territory' and work together in a cooperative way," she said.

"If we don't do that, we're not going to survive as a community. We're going to die," she warned. □