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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Russian Jewish leader arrested

Russian police arrested a prominent Jewish leader in St. Petersburg and may charge him with kidnapping two people, according to the city's chief prosecutor.

Mikhail Mirilashvili, 40, is one of the city's most influential business magnates and head of the St Petersburg branch of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Supremacist pleads guilty

A white supremacist pleaded guilty to charges that he killed a Filipino American postman after wounding four people at a Jewish community center during an August 1999 rampage in the Los Angeles area. [Page 3]

Israel agrees to resume talks

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to resume peace talks with the Palestinians on Thursday in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba.

Wednesday's decision came a day after Israel suspended the negotiations following the killing of two Israelis in the West Bank.

The Bush administration had pressed for a resumption of the talks. [Page 1]

Israel has new plan for China sale

Israeli officials plan to approach the Bush administration with a proposal to enable the Jewish state to sell an airborne radar system to China, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The paper reported that Israel plans to suggest selling Beijing a scaled-down version of the Phalcon system.

Last July, Prime Minister Ehud Barak canceled the Phalcon sale to China after intense pressure from U.S. officials.

Israel: Hamas funneling funds

Citibank officials are seeking suggestions from the U.S. Treasury Department on how to deal with Israeli concerns that Hamas is using the bank to funnel money to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to the Jerusalem Post.

The officials took the action after the newspaper reported earlier this week that Israeli counterterrorism experts had met with Citibank executives to discuss the matter.

As Bush prepares Mideast team, sides meet in Taba — without U.S.

By Matthew Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States' role in peace negotiations has shifted from active participant to bystander, less than 48 hours after President Bush took the oath of office.

State Department officials downplayed the lack of American involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian talks now under way in Taba, Egypt. Citing other examples of negotiations that occurred without U.S. mediation — such as the original Oslo breakthrough in 1993 — these officials insist that it does not represent a change in U.S. policy on the peace process.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday that U.S. officials are "keeping in close touch with the parties" in the Taba negotiations, though there is no U.S. official on the ground. Instead, U.S. ambassadors in the region are being briefed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority and are relaying the information to Washington.

In its first major involvement in the peace process since taking office, the Bush administration pressed for a resumption of the talks after Israel suspended the negotiations following Tuesday's killing of two Israelis in the West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided Wednesday to resume the talks on Thursday.

The Palestinian Authority on Monday issued a broadside against the Clinton administration's handling of the peace process, saying the United States had "increasingly identified" with Israeli positions and had relied on "constructive ambiguity" to craft interim agreements that denied Arab rights.

Many Israelis, in contrast, feel Clinton leaned too heavily on Israeli governments to make concessions without demanding corresponding Palestinian compromises. Yet the preponderance of Jews in leading positions on the Clinton team aroused suspicions in the Arab world, which portrayed these negotiators as Zionist sympathizers.

It is unclear exactly who will be the new administration's point man for the peace process, as Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell have yet to make a number of key diplomatic appointments. Matters also have been complicated by the resignation of Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross, who shepherded the peace process from its inception seven years ago.

A State Department official close to the peace process said that Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Walker is taking the lead in monitoring the peace process. Aaron Miller, who served as Ross' deputy, is working under Walker, the official said.

That structure will continue until Powell or Bush designates new leaders for the peace process.

It is widely expected that Ross' position will not be filled, and that the shift of responsibility for the negotiations to the Near Eastern Affairs bureau will be permanent.

The official also said Powell has been working with the State Department's Middle East team and has outlined objectives for the peace process.

He would not say if they differ from those of the Clinton administration.

The memo, signed by the Palestinian negotiating team, said the negotiations had created "false impressions" about the chances of establishing a lasting peace.

Israeli Embassy spokesman Mark Regev said the memorandum was an attempt by the Palestinians to justify their actions during the Clinton administration.

"The Palestinians are very much aware that there is a large section" of American

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon addresses U.S. audience

Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon said he would "negotiate immediately" with the Palestinians if he is elected prime minister next month.

In a televised address sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations that was beamed from Tel Aviv to audiences in New York and Washington, Sharon also said Wednesday he would welcome U.S. mediation in the negotiations.

Arabs protest at Barak speech

At least 50 Israeli Arabs protested as Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak made a campaign stop Wednesday in Nazareth.

The protesters waved held photos of 13 members of their community who were killed during dashes with Israeli security forces in October. Barak made the campaign appearance in an effort to win Israeli Arab support in the upcoming election.

Israeli diplomats to vote

More than 3,000 Israeli officials in consulates and embassies around the world will vote Thursday in the upcoming Israeli election.

Diplomats, government officials and representatives of certain Jewish organizations will cast their votes in 99 polling stations around the world, less than two weeks before the new Israeli prime minister is chosen on Feb. 6.

Israeli escapes Jericho crowd

A quick-thinking Israeli who mistakenly drove into Jericho escaped from a crowd of Palestinians by saying he had come for a meeting with Jibril Rajoub, the Palestinian security chief.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported that Palestinian police who had stopped the Israeli immediately changed their demeanor and escorted him to Rajoub's office, where he was subsequently transferred to a joint Israeli-Palestinian liaison office.



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opinion "who are very concerned about the Palestinians not being able to pick up the ball that was given to them by Prime Minister Barak," Regev said.

The State Department said it had no comment on the memo.

Boucher said the United States was not invited to participate in the talks.

In the past, the United States either was invited to participate in high-level talks or asked to participate.

Given the change of administration over the weekend, the parties may have been hesitant to ask for U.S. aid while the government is in flux, commentators suggested.

"There's an awareness that we are in transition and the United States doesn't have a team together," said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "We need to be cautious about extrapolating that this is what the next four years will look like."

State Department officials emphasized that the United States is willing to play a role, if the parties request.

"This confirms, yet again, that it is the Israelis and the Palestinians that are pushing this forward, not the Americans," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum.

Pipes said there is an inherent reluctance among presidents to get involved in the Middle East so soon into a new administration, but almost every president in the last 30 years eventually has gravitated toward the region.

"It will take Bush time to get up to speed," Pipes said.

With many appointments still unfilled, career service officers have temporarily taken over leadership roles, while holdouts from the Clinton administration — like Walker — will remain until they are replaced. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jesus at inaugurations: It's the same old, same old

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — For those Jews taken aback by the invocation of "Jesus the Christ" and "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" at President Bush's inauguration, rest assured: This was nothing new.

According to the Anti-Defamation League — which has fielded a number of inquiries at its New York headquarters and regional offices since Saturday's inauguration festivities — Jesus has been referred to in each inauguration of the past 60 years.

"We've heard from members of the community about this, through e-mails and phone calls, who were disturbed by what they heard," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL. "But we're not responding because this is not unusual.

"That's the tradition. We would have liked it to be a bit more inclusive," Foxman said. "But on the other hand, the new president is entitled to have his moment of personal faith."

The ADL attracted headlines during the presidential campaign when it publicly criticized the Jewish vice presidential candidate, Joseph Lieberman, for invoking God and religion.

But the Christian flavor of inaugural ceremonies dates to the very first.

In a 1996 article in the *Columbia Law Review*, Steven Epstein wrote that "formal prayers by Christian ministers have been associated with presidential inaugurations since the inauguration of George Washington."

Consider the following, all of which have been cited in the *Congressional Record*:

- During the second Clinton inauguration in 1997, an invocation was given in the name of "Father and God" and ended invoking "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

- At the first inauguration of President Reagan in 1981, the prayer called on the "Lord of lords and King of kings, even Jesus Christ" to help us "stand proudly as American citizens."

- And in 1937, a minister called on God to "bless abundantly our Chief Magistrate," Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "through Christ, our Lord." □

JEWISH WORLD

Under fire for 'love child,' Jesse Jackson turns to Torah

By Julie Wiener

Wiesel: Defer Jerusalem issue

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel called on Israel and the Palestinians to postpone negotiations about Jerusalem. "Perhaps in 20 years," he wrote in an Op-Ed in Wednesday's New York Times, the Palestinians "will then understand why the Jewish soul carries within it the wound and the love of a city whose keys are protected by its memory."

More security at Argentine sites

Argentine officials beefed up security around Jewish and Muslim sites after a bomb shattered the front windows of a mosque in Buenos Aires.

No one took responsibility for the weekend bombing, which caused minor injuries to a police officer. Investigators linked the attack to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

British schools get Shoah packet

British schools are receiving a special package of Holocaust-related materials for the nation's first Holocaust Memorial Day on Saturday.

Education Secretary David Blunkett, whose department produced and distributed the materials, said the effort is intended to help "ensure that our children understand the value of diversity and tolerance."

Shoah survivors sue Yahoo

Holocaust survivors in France sued the CEO of Yahoo for its former online auctions of Nazi propaganda.

The lawsuit, which seeks a symbolic one French franc, comes weeks after the Internet portal removed Nazi paraphernalia from its site.

Yahoo's move followed a French court decision requiring it to block Internet users in France from accessing these auctions.

Yahoo is appealing the decision in a U.S. court.

Israeli to face ecstasy charges

An Israeli living in Holland will be brought to New York to face charges that he was a leading exporter of the drug ecstasy to the United States, according to U.S. officials.

Officials in Holland accused Sean Erez of being the brains behind a smuggling operation that used Chasidic youths as couriers.

William Stern dies at 90

William Stern, a former executive director of the Workmen's Circle, died Jan. 18 at the age of 90. Stern began working for the Workmen's Circle in 1938 and was executive director from 1970 to 1979. He was also president of the Forward Association, which publishes the Forward newspapers, from 1988 to 1994.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Call him Yishai.

With word of his out-of-wedlock child on the newsstands, the Rev. Jesse Jackson is seeking comfort from Jewish sources: the biblical story of Judah and Tamar.

Jackson, a prominent civil rights leader and two-time presidential candidate whose relations with the Jewish community have not always been smooth, spent an hour in New York on Tuesday studying Torah with Rabbi Marc Schneier.

Schneier presented Jackson with a Hebrew Bible inscribed with the Hebrew version of his name, Yishai.

The head of the North American Boards of Rabbis, Schneier also is president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a group that focuses on strengthening black-Jewish relations. The two studied the portion from Genesis in which Judah sleeps with his daughter-in-law, mistaking her for a prostitute.

Despite his transgression, Judah is chosen from among his brothers to become heir to Jacob's dynasty, which later produces King David and, Jewish tradition holds, will one day produce the Messiah.

"We had a whole discussion as to why Jacob bequeathed royalty, or for that matter the messianic dynasty, to Judah over Joseph, his favorite son," Schneier said.

The sages explain that it was because Judah was able to admit his mistakes, Schneier said.

"One of the key elements of leadership is the capacity to admit mistakes and the ability to change direction after one has admitted those mistakes," he said.

Jackson, a Baptist minister, had never heard that particular interpretation of the Judah story before, Schneier said.

"He was very clear in expressing his remorse and acknowledging the wrong he'd done," Schneier said.

Jackson was in New York this week for a conference of his ecumenical organization, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. He could not be reached for comment.

On Jan. 18, Jackson, who has been married for 38 years, publicly acknowledged and apologized for fathering a child with an employee in his organization. Jackson had the affair while serving as one of President Clinton's spiritual advisers during the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal.

In addition to talking Torah, the Jackson-Schneier hevruta, or study pair, spent a few minutes on politics.

Jackson once was a pariah in the Jewish community because of his 1980s friendship with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, a renowned anti-Semite, and a 1984 reference to New York City as "Hymietown." In recent years, though, his relations with Jews have improved markedly, and in 1999 he took a leading diplomatic role on behalf of 13 Jews jailed in Iran on accusations of espionage. □

JCC gunman to receive life in jail

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — A white supremacist has pleaded guilty to seriously wounding five people in a shooting rampage at a local Jewish community center and murdering a Filipino American mail carrier in August 1999.

In a deal with prosecutors, Buford O. Furrow Jr., 39, is to receive a mandatory life prison sentence, but as a result of Wednesday's plea, he will be spared a possible death sentence. Federal prosecutors and public defenders concluded separately that Furrow suffers from serious psychiatric problems, the Los Angeles Times reported.

During his Aug. 10, 1999, attack on the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Granada Hills, Calif., Furrow sprayed the lobby with 70 bullets, wounding an adult, a teenager and three young boys.

He subsequently killed mail carrier Joseph Iletto.

Victims of the Jewish center attack and their families were not immediately available for comment. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

With Israeli elections looming, Barak and Sharon plans emerge

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With less than two weeks left until elections for prime minister, Israelis have a general idea of what the two candidates would offer the Palestinians in peace talks, but they are short on specifics.

Through leaks from the candidates' campaigns and comments from some of their closest aides, a fairly detailed picture emerges of the negotiating stances of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and opposition leader Ariel Sharon.

Settlements. In campaign speeches, Sharon promises not to dismantle any settlements.

However, Likud Knesset Member Reuven Rivlin, a close associate of Sharon's, told JTA this week that Sharon's position may in fact be more nuanced. In future negotiations, "Sharon will not provoke the Palestinians on the settlements," Rivlin said.

"Sharon will not freeze the settlements, but he will not allow 'provocative settlements,'" Rivlin said. "It is not clear whether he will allow expansion of existing settlements."

Rivlin didn't explain how he defines "provocative" settlements.

Barak has agreed to consider American proposals that call for the dismantling of far-flung settlements, but wants to annex large settlement blocs in the West Bank close to Israel's 1967 borders that include some 80 percent of the settler population.

According to his deputy minister of defense, Ephraim Sneh, Barak will not dismantle any settlements if the negotiations become deadlocked, despite calls to this effect from supporters.

Jerusalem. Barak said Tuesday that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators must find a way to share administration of Jerusalem's Old City and its holy sites, "so there won't be a split and divided city, and there will be free access to all."

At the same time, Barak promised that Jerusalem sites holy to Jews "will be under our sovereignty."

So far, Barak's suggestions have proved unacceptable to the Palestinians. Like the Palestinians, Sharon refuses to make any concessions on Jerusalem and its holy sites.

How would Sharon bridge this gap with the Palestinians?

"We will have to leave the entire issue on hold," Rivlin said. "Quite simply, we will not negotiate over Jerusalem."

Borders. Both Barak and Sharon have accepted the notion of a Palestinian state, but they differ on its size.

According to reports from the peace talks, Barak has offered the Palestinians some 95 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with an exchange of Israeli territory for the rest. Sharon says he is willing to offer 42 percent.

Instead of a final peace agreement, Sharon "will offer the Palestinians a long-range interim agreement," Rivlin said. "The bait will be an offer of territorial continuum. Until now, the Palestinians have no territorial continuum."

Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank currently are divided by Israeli corridors.

In addition, before the current unrest Palestinians could travel on Israeli highways along a "safe-passage route" between the West Bank and Gaza. At times, the Palestinians have demanded that this

route across Israel be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty.

Sharon spoke recently of creating a train route from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank city of Ramallah, providing Palestinians with a new way to travel across Israel.

Will the Palestinians accept a train in place of land?

"We can only move forward on the basis of mutual interests," Rivlin said. "If they don't accept our offers, we will have to wait for a settlement."

Palestinian refugees. Sharon refuses to grant the refugees — estimates say there could be as many as 5 million, including their descendants — the right to return to homes they abandoned in Israel during the 1948 War of Independence.

Barak reportedly is ready to accept a limited number of refugees on the basis of family reunions, leaving to Israel the final decision of who would be permitted to return. The figure of 100,000 refugees is sometimes mentioned in this context.

Population interaction. If Palestinian violence persists and there is no peace agreement, Barak and Sharon share similar ideas on the relations between the two peoples.

Barak has spoken of "unilateral separation," meaning that Israel would treat the Palestinians as it would any hostile neighbors, erecting border fences and blocking Palestinian workers from entering Israel.

In addition, many Israelis have called on Barak to dismantle isolated settlements even without an agreement and move Israeli troops closer to the 1967 borders, unilaterally determining Israel's borders.

Sneh presented JTA with a different definition of unilateral separation, however. "What it essentially means is keeping the present settlements, isolating them from the Palestinian environment by more effective protection methods, and hoping for better days," he said.

Economic separation, he insisted, is impossible.

"For better or worse, both parties are stuck with each other," he said.

In case of a total deadlock in the negotiations, the solutions envisaged by both Barak and Sharon are similar: Try to preserve the status quo, but prepare for the worst. □

Russian rights activists protest

MOSCOW (JTA) — More than 1,000 activists from across Russia gathered here over the weekend to declare a national human rights "emergency."

But many Jewish leaders, objecting to the gathering's anti-Kremlin tone, stayed away.

Speakers at the two-day Emergency Congress in Defense of Human Rights, sponsored by the liberal Yabloko Party and some U.S. foundations, denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin for the war in Chechnya, as well as alleged human rights violations and encroachments on freedom of the press.

Grigory Yavlinsky, the Yabloko leader who attracted a large number of Jewish voters in Russia's last presidential elections, said there is a clear totalitarian tendency in Russian society, which he said threatens the constitution.

Alexander Axelrod, who works in the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League, said he did not take part in the congress because he considers the anti-government stance of its organizers unproductive. □