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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli motorist killed in ambush

An Israeli was shot and killed in an ambush as he was driving north of Jerusalem.

The attack took place Monday as Palestinian gunmen fired at cars driving along a bypass road near the West Bank city of Ramallah, according to Israeli police. The road is often used by Jewish settlers who live in the West Bank.

In more violence, Israeli troops shot and killed a Palestinian man during a battle Monday with Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip. Monday's confrontation near the settlement of Neveh Dekalim was the first battle-related death in days.

Faith-based plan unveiled

The former mayor of Indianapolis, who is Jewish, will not head a newly created U.S. office on faith-based organizations. Instead, Stephen Goldsmith was named Monday to lead a council that will advise the new office, which in turn will seek to distribute billions of dollars in federal funds to religious groups that provide social services.

Goldsmith was thought to be the top candidate to head the office, but University of Pennsylvania Professor John Dilulio Jr. was tapped for the post instead.

At a meeting Monday when he announced the outlines of his faith-based plan, President Bush reassured the president of the Orthodox Union, Harvey Blitz, that religious minorities would be protected under the plan. The O.U. and other Orthodox groups have long supported the initiative.

Barak blasts Arafat 'lies'

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak accused Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat of unleashing an "attack of lies" against Israel.

Barak's comment Monday came a day after Arafat unleashed a scathing attack against the Jewish state at an economic forum in Davos, Switzerland, attended by international business and political leaders. During Sunday's session in Davos, attended by Israeli Cabinet minister Shimon Peres, Arafat accused Israel of waging "fascist military aggression" against the Palestinian people and using weapons containing depleted uranium, which Israel has denied. At the end of the session, Arafat and Peres shook hands.

The United States also criticized Arafat for his attack on Israel.

ISRAEL VOTES

Always a swing vote, Russians deserting Barak for Sharon camp

By Avi Machlis

ASHDOD, Israel (JTA) — Several hundred Russian immigrants have packed into a gaudy seaside wedding hall in the port city of Ashdod to hear Ariel Sharon make his pitch for the premiership.

They wait patiently in their seats for the Likud's prime ministerial candidate.

The subdued mood of the crowd contrasts with the urgency of Israel's imminent elections.

Attempts by Likud Knesset member Naomi Blumenthal to rouse the crowd — in slow, often patronizing Hebrew — meet with muted applause.

She and others try unsuccessfully to pump up the atmosphere by repeatedly reminding the audience that Sharon will be a strong leader.

But when Sharon takes the podium, his charisma slowly wins over even this quiet audience.

He addresses Russian army veterans soldier to soldier, promises to revive Israel's national pride and deterrence, and pledges to solve the housing crisis of elderly immigrants.

There is little strongman rhetoric, beyond his campaign promises not to negotiate with the Palestinians under fire.

What is happening here — and in similar gatherings across the country — could prove pivotal as Sharon faces incumbent Prime Minister Ehud Barak in the Feb. 6 elections.

In the last three elections, voters among the 1 million immigrants from the former Soviet Union — about one-sixth of Israel's population — have played a decisive role in the outcome of the elections.

Unlike most Israelis who maintain a strong loyalty to a particular party or camp, the Russians are known to be protest voters, backing a new horse each time.

In 1992, they supported Yitzhak Rabin of Labor; in 1996, they shifted to the Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu.

Now, after helping Barak defeat Netanyahu in 1999, they have largely shifted their allegiance to Sharon.

"The distance is enormous, and the Russians are part of the game," Hanoach Smith, an Israeli pollster, said, referring to Sharon's lead in the polls.

Several polls show Sharon with twice as much support as Barak among Russian immigrants.

Indeed, Sharon has won the endorsement of the two major immigrant parties, including the one led by Natan Sharansky.

Barak, however, has not written off the Russian vote.

The premier, too, traveled to Ashdod this week to campaign in the Russian community.

At the Ashdod rally, Sharon refrains from speaking Russian as he has at earlier rallies — some immigrants have said his Russian comes off as childish.

But he impresses the crowd and draws hearty laughs at least half a dozen times by correcting his translator.

Finally, he addresses one of the audience's main concerns, promising not to be manipulated by fervently Orthodox parties such as Shas.

"Do not believe the rumors," Sharon urged.

"I have seen what they are publishing, that I will be taken captive by the haredim.

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak denies unity gov't talks

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak reiterated that no contacts are under way to form a national unity government with opposition leader Ariel Sharon after the elections.

His statement Monday came amid renewed speculation that both Barak and Sharon would pursue a unity government regardless of who wins the Feb. 6 vote for prime minister.

Report: Arms smuggled into Gaza

Smugglers off the coast of the Gaza Strip helped the Palestinians obtain rocket-propelled grenades, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, which cited Israel Defense Force officials.

The paper reported Monday that Israeli security forces have no idea who is behind the smuggling. The IDF suspects the Palestinians are using sea routes to smuggle weapons into Gaza as part of an effort to prepare for an escalation in their confrontation with Israel, the report said.

IDF to probe Hebron shooting

The chief of staff of the Israel Defense Force ordered military police to investigate the shooting of a Palestinian in Hebron earlier this month by Israeli troops, who then tried to prevent a television crew from filming the incident.

Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz said Monday the soldiers opened fire in violation of standing orders and should not have prevented the free movement of the media. He also said the soldiers should have provided immediate medical help to the man, who was shot in the leg.

Israel's central bank lowers rate

The Bank of Israel lowered its key lending rate by 0.3 percentage points to 7.7 percent. The move was the 13th rate reduction announced by Israel's central bank during the past 15 months. The cut had been widely expected because of tame inflation in Israel.



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Throughout the years, I always took others captive. I myself was never taken captive and I am nobody's hostage. Nobody's."

Despite his double-digit lead over Barak, the leader of the opposition is taking nothing for granted.

Blumenthal, who is heading immigrant outreach for the Sharon campaign, said the party has focused heavily on teaching immigrants who Sharon is.

"They are definitely impressed by Arik as a model leader," she said, using his nickname.

"The immigrants take national pride very seriously. They are asking, 'What has happened to our national pride? Why are we willing to give up all of the elements that connect us to this land?'"

"The immigrants cannot stand the defeatism of Barak and his willingness to run after Arafat," Blumenthal said.

But the crisis with the Palestinians and the peace process is not the only thing on immigrants' minds.

Largely secular, they generally support a separation of religion and state and are closely watching to see which candidate is most likely to court the powerful Shas after the elections.

Part of the immigrants' frustration with Barak is the alliance he made with Shas and his failure to implement the civil reforms he promised in his 1999 campaign.

Yet they are equally concerned that Sharon — who is known for his close ties to the fervently Orthodox community — may be no different.

"I don't trust either of them, and I want to know what the difference is between Sharon and Barak, specifically on Shas," said Tatiana Brodetsky, 42, a high-school teacher who came to the Ashdod rally and was quickly turned off by the tough talk preceding Sharon's arrival.

Yet Sharon certainly seems to be investing much more effort in the Russian community than Barak is, Brodetsky said.

Barak ads in the Russian press are few, she said, while Sharon has blanketed the Russian press with advertisements, and Sharon operatives are working immigrant neighborhoods far more thoroughly than is Barak's team.

Roman Bronfman, a former member of Sharansky's Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Russian immigrant party who now supports Barak, admits that Barak is at a disadvantage on several fronts.

"Among the immigrants there is an advantage for nationalist leaders," said Bronfman, who now heads the splinter Democratic Choice party.

"But they are also very disappointed on the economic front and the issues of religion and state."

At the same time, Bronfman said he is frustrated that some of the more controversial elements of Sharon's past are not being discussed in the Russian press.

"The immigrants do not know much about Sharon's record," said Bronfman, referring to the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that Sharon initiated as defense minister and his indirect responsibility for the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians by Israel's Lebanese Christian militia allies.

"There simply is no public debate."

Furthermore, Bronfman added, recent controversial remarks by Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the right-wing immigrant party, Israel, Our Home, who advocated bombing targets in the Muslim and Arab world if regional fighting persists, were not covered in leading Russian newspapers.

At the Ashdod rally, Sharon was flanked by Lieberman and Sharansky, who support his candidacy.

At the rally, some participants admit that they know nothing about Sharon's record in Lebanon.

Even those who do — like Oleg Kolchinsky, a 44-year-old worker at a high-tech plant who immigrated from Ukraine less than two years ago — say it may not affect their support for Sharon.

"I had some sympathy for Barak, but after the events of October and November something snapped," Kolchinsky said, referring to the violent conflict with the Palestinians.

"Sharon is a very strong man, and our enemies will listen to him. They will know that if Sharon is the leader, they cannot ignore us." □

JEWISH WORLD

Groups help India quake victims

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, B'nai B'rith International and the American Jewish World Service are collecting contributions to help victims of the earthquake that has killed thousands in India.

Further information is available at www.jdc.org, www.bnaibrith.org and www.ajws.org.

Group to locate slave laborers

The Claims Conference is launching a worldwide effort to locate an estimated 170,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors who may be eligible to receive payments from a \$5 billion German fund to compensate Holocaust-era slave laborers.

Claimants, who face an August 2001 deadline, can obtain application forms from the group's Web site at www.claimscon.org.

The Claims Conference plans to announce further details about its worldwide outreach program at a news conference Tuesday.

U.N. official addresses Web hate

Technology companies and the media must help halt the spread of hate messages on the Internet, according to the U.N. high commissioner for human rights.

"A technical advance which has a great capacity to enlighten us and entertain us becomes, in the hands of some, a weapon of racism," Mary Robinson said Monday at an international conference on combating intolerance, held in Stockholm.

ADL blasts Jordanian blacklist

The Anti-Defamation League said it is outraged at the latest blacklist issued by Jordan's professional associations against companies and individuals who have established ties with Israel.

Among those on the list is the Cabinet chief of King Abdullah, the ADL said.

"The blacklisting of the King of Jordan's Cabinet chief is an affront to the royal family, and in effect is a blacklisting of the king himself," said the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman.

STAR initiative funds 25 projects

A philanthropy promoting synagogue renewal allocated more than \$565,000 in funding to 25 U.S. communities.

Among the largest recipients of STAR's first round of grants are a multi-synagogue effort to provide leadership training for Boston Jews in their 20s, a project in which Orthodox rabbis serve as an educational resource to the Boca Raton Jewish community, and expansion of a home-based outreach project for unaffiliated Jews in Portland, Oregon.

Jewish groups: Time to make good on Bush's promise to move embassy

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Just a week into President George W. Bush's "honeymoon" period, Jewish groups are questioning when he will make good on his campaign promise to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Bush received international attention during the presidential campaign when he told a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that one of the first acts of his presidency would be to move the embassy, as mandated by Congress.

"As soon as I take office, I will begin the process of moving the United States ambassador to the city Israel has chosen as its capital," Bush said in the speech.

Campaign officials later clarified that the embassy, not just the ambassador, would be moved.

But that speech came last May, before the Palestinians erupted in anti-Israel violence last fall that has threatened to destroy the peace process.

Now, in a much different climate, the president is being asked to make good on his promise.

Israel's conquest of eastern Jerusalem in 1967 is not recognized internationally, and most countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel keep their embassies in the Tel Aviv area.

Only Costa Rica and El Salvador keep their embassies in Jerusalem.

A nearly unanimous Congress passed a law in 1995 mandating that the United States move its embassy to Jerusalem as well. However, President Clinton repeatedly took advantage of an escape clause to avoid moving the embassy, citing national security reasons and the ongoing peace talks.

With Jerusalem up for negotiation as part of the peace talks, Clinton feared moving the embassy would disrupt the process.

Clinton's latest waiver was signed in December, postponing the move for an additional six months.

Bush can override that waiver at any time.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said last week that Bush has started looking into moving the embassy, but no one at the White House has said how long the process will take.

Sources at the State Department, however, said the administration will wait until the waiver expires in May before deciding on future steps.

Some Jewish leaders have become quite adamant that Bush must be held to his promise. The National Jewish Democratic Council started an "Embassy Watch" soon after Bush took office.

The Zionist Organization of America will urge Bush to follow through on his campaign promise and seek support from Republican lawmakers, National President Morton Klein said.

"This is an opportunity to send a strong message to" Palestinian Authority President Yasser "Arafat that the U.S. supports Israel," Klein said.

AIPAC executive director Howard Kohr said the issue "still is important to the community," but predicted that Bush would want to reassess the situation after Israel's Feb. 6 election for prime minister.

"Whatever happens in this arena needs to be done in consultation with the current government of Israel," Kohr said.

"That conversation hasn't even started yet because we don't know exactly what the government in Israel will be."

Marshall Breger, a law professor at Catholic University of America, said it is unrealistic to expect that Bush would take such a controversial step so early in his presidency.

"Bush has not yet put together his Middle East team, so it's hard to believe he'll examine Middle East policy before he puts his team together," Breger said.

And with the climate in the Middle East so dramatically changed since Bush's AIPAC speech eight months ago, Breger said, the new president must reassess the political ramifications of moving the embassy.

"Do you want to throw a match where there is already gas?" Breger asked. □

Across Europe, events mark Shoah memorial day

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — From Britain to Italy, from Sweden to Germany, Europeans are seeking to make the horrors of the past a lesson for the future in marking the 56th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Saturday's events ranged from officially mandated Holocaust memorial days in several countries to a low-key gathering of survivors at the site of the former Nazi death camp, which was liberated by the Soviet forces on Jan. 27, 1945.

Official ceremonies in Germany, Italy, Britain and Sweden commemorated the Shoah, but also recalled victims of other persecutions and genocides.

The aim was to make the Holocaust the key to confronting broader issues of hatred and discrimination at a time of resurgent neo-Nazism and a proliferation of Holocaust denial.

In Germany, which since 1996 has made Jan. 27 an official Day of Remembrance for Victims of Nazism, Parliament President Wolfgang Thierse stressed the dangers posed by extremism.

A recent upsurge in hate crimes has raised concern in Germany. According to official figures, there were 840 violent anti-Semitic or anti-foreigner crimes in Germany in 2000, about 100 more than in 1999.

"This isn't about remembrance without consequences," Thierse said in a radio broadcast. He called for a "commitment to democracy and against raging right-wing extremism."

Official ceremonies in Berlin were held at the site of a planned national Holocaust memorial, and flags on public buildings flew at half-mast.

Britain and Italy marked their first official Holocaust memorial days with high-profile ceremonies, broadcasts, performances and other public events in numerous towns and cities.

London's main memorial ceremony featured a candle-lighting by Prince Charles, speeches by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Orthodox Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, and readings by actors Emma Thompson and Sir Ian McKellen.

"What made the Holocaust so frightening was its goal, its unimaginable scale and its wickedness in attempting to use false science to further human destruction," Blair said in his speech.

"The Holocaust was the greatest act of collective evil the world has ever known," he said. "It is to reaffirm the triumph of good over that evil that we remember it."

The victims of persecution or genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia also were recalled at the London event.

In Italy, too, remembrance of the Shoah was used as a tool to warn against contemporary evils and draw lessons for today.

Officials placed an emphasis on educational programs, given recent surveys showing that many Italians, particularly young people, are ignorant of fascist Italy's wartime role in the Holocaust.

In a speech to students in the southern Italian city of Agrigento, the president of the lower house of Parliament, Luciano Violante, referred to slaughters in the Soviet gulags, in Africa and in Cambodia.

"You have to know how to say no when you are asked to do something that is against democracy, against freedom, against civil and moral values," he said.

The president of Italy's Senate, Nicolo Mancino, told another audience, "with the passing of time, the worry is becoming strong

that a veil of forgetfulness may fall on what happened regarding European racism and the Holocaust."

Time and timing were crucial factors in establishing official Holocaust memorial days in Italy and Britain and in mandating high-profile observances of the occasion.

Fifty-six years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the Holocaust is passing from the realm of living memory to that of history.

The new commemorations, in fact, are part of a process in which the Shoah has become recognized as part of a broad international experience, not just a Jewish trauma.

A year ago, leaders from nearly four dozen European countries held an unprecedented international forum in Stockholm, where they acknowledged the Shoah as part of their countries' national histories and embedded this recognition within the parameters of public national discourse.

It is a paradox that this is paralleled by resurgent neo-Nazi extremism and Holocaust denial, the rise of far-right political parties and, in some countries, a glorification of fascist history and wartime fascist leaders.

"The selection of January 27 as a focus for commemoration stresses the centrality of Auschwitz — the place where at least 1.5 million people were massacred — as a powerful contemporary symbol," said Italian scholar Francesco Spagnolo, who directs a Jewish music study center in Milan.

"Indeed, beginning January 27, 2001, Auschwitz officially becomes both the no-man's-land of human history, as well as the arena in which Europe's future has to be played," he said. □

ARTS & CULTURE

Tolerance exhibit shines light on hatemongering Internet sites

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The Museum of Tolerance here has unveiled a new \$5 million interactive exhibit to combat the proliferation of Internet sites by hate groups.

Visitors to the exhibit see eight large screens, illustrating some of the most heinous hate crimes of the last few years and community responses to them.

"Hate sites by neo-Nazis, white supremacists and other bigots represent one of the major growth industries on the Internet," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which created the museum.

"In 1995, when the Oklahoma City federal building was blown up, there was one such site. Now there are over 2,000."

At the entrance to the exhibit is a bank of computer screens on which the visitor can instantly call up many of the 2,000 Web sites run by the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, skin-heads and Holocaust deniers. Globalhate.com will be integrated into a training courses for law enforcement officers and educators that has been taken so far by some 16,000 professionals, said Liebe Geft, director of the Museum of Tolerance.

Since Globalhate.com can easily be misused as an access guide to hate groups, it will not be available on the Internet, said senior researcher Rick Eaton, who designed the exhibit.

Globalhate.com is part of a current \$10 million renovation of the museum. The Millennium Time Machine, which will deal with issues of prejudice and bigotry on a worldwide scale, is slated to open next month. □