



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Shoah commemorations held

Sirens wailed for two minutes across Israel on Thursday as the country commemorated victims of the Holocaust. In the Knesset, Cabinet ministers and legislators read the names of relatives killed in the Holocaust in a ceremony called "Each Person Has a Name."

In Poland, more than 1,000 Jewish youths from around the world participated in the annual March of the Living on Thursday at the Auschwitz death camp. The two-mile march from the main gate at Auschwitz to the gas chambers at Birkenau was started by the Israeli Education Ministry in 1988.

Zuckerman bound for top post

Mortimer Zuckerman was recommended to serve as the next chairman of the influential Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. As expected, Zuckerman was selected Thursday over two other finalists by the conference's nominating committee. A confirmation vote by the entire 54-member conference has yet to be scheduled. Zuckerman, the honorary president of the America-Israel Friendship League, is a real-estate magnate and publisher of the U.S. News & World Report and the New York Daily News.

Bush honors Shoah victims

President Bush said the Holocaust is "defined as much by the courage of the lost as by the cruelty of the guilty."

Speaking to hundreds of people gathered Thursday in the Capitol rotunda on Holocaust Remembrance Day, Bush urged the teaching of conscience, moral discernment, decency and tolerance to stop evil from triumphing again. [Page 3]

U.S. wants boys home from Sinai

U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld caught Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon by surprise with the announcement that the Bush administration wants to withdraw American soldiers serving as peacekeepers in the Sinai, The New York Times reported.

Sharon initially balked at the idea, presented during his visit to Washington last month, according to Israeli diplomats. But Sharon ultimately said he would go along with the idea if a symbolic U.S. presence remains.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews mute reaction to Powell blast after U.S. assurance it's still pro-Israel

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish groups might have been expected to react strongly to Secretary of State Colin Powell's criticism of Israeli military reprisals in the Gaza Strip as "excessive and disproportionate" — yet few organizations took the administration to task for the harshest American language against Israel in quite some time.

With a few notable exceptions, Jewish organizations let Powell's comment slide, choosing to say little in a situation that might have prompted a harsh reaction under past administrations.

The reasons for the muted reaction are complex, Jewish leaders say.

For one, Powell's comments were the first major strike against what has been a surprisingly warm relationship between the Bush administration and Israel under new Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

More importantly, the Bush administration has made it clear to key Jewish leaders — through subtle comments in private conversations — that criticism of Israeli actions may help the United States push its Iraq policy and gain credibility in the Arab world. Yet Bush has made clear that when push comes to shove, America stands firmly behind Israel, they said.

"The State Department feels an obligation to shore up the standing of moderate Arab allies" — such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah — "who are under enormous pressure by their own people in regard to the perceived bias in favor of Israel," said one Jewish source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The statement the other day was constructed with an Arab audience in mind."

In several private conversations over recent months, Bush administration officials had warned American Jewish leaders that Israel was not exempt from American criticism.

"The assurance was that, fundamentally, we're still there and you can count on us," said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress. "There would still be moments of opposition. The question is whether this is just a moment or is a significant change of attitude or approach."

Many Jewish leaders believe the quick escalation of violence in recent days was extraordinary, warranting Powell's comments.

"A lot of people in the American Jewish community have been sobered up by the events of the last week," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

"They were surprised by how quickly events could spread out of control."

Roth said Jewish organizations needed to "take a deep breath, count to 10 and get a broader perspective of what the administration is expressing its opinion about."

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations tried to get more details about Powell's intentions, speaking with White House and State Department officials in the hours after the announcement, said Malcolm Hoenlein, the group's executive vice chairman.

"We told Powell that we felt that this language was inappropriate and subject to distortion by the media," Hoenlein said.

Still, Hoenlein said, the conference's reaction was muted because they considered Powell's statement balanced.

While criticizing the Israeli incursion into Gaza, Powell acknowledged that it was

MIDEAST FOCUS

Bush, Sharon try to ease tensions

President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon spoke by phone Wednesday in an apparent effort to smooth tensions following strong U.S. criticism of an Israeli incursion earlier this week into a Palestinian-controlled area of the Gaza Strip.

Sharon reiterated that peace talks with the Palestinians could take place only when the situation quieted down, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Bush replied that the United States will continue to do its utmost to influence the Palestinian Authority to halt terror and violence from its territory, the ministry said.

Palestinians launch more mortars

Palestinians fired two mortars Thursday at a kibbutz near the border with the Gaza Strip. A day earlier, mortars were fired from Gaza at the same kibbutz and at the Kfar Darom settlement in Gaza.

The renewed mortar fire came despite two Israeli incursions this week into Palestinian-controlled areas of Gaza, aimed at stopping such attacks. Israeli tanks responded to the Wednesday night mortar attacks with fire that seriously wounded a supporter of Hamas.

Petition: No funds for concert

The Simon Wiesenthal Center petitioned Israel's Supreme Court to block Israeli officials from providing any financial support for a planned July concert that will include works by German composer Richard Wagner. The performance of works by the "arch anti-Semite" will be "an affront to the victims of the Holocaust," the center said in a statement Thursday.

Explosions rock Ramallah HQ

Several explosions shook the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority's Force 17 security force in Ramallah on Thursday. Witnesses said the source of the blast was unclear. Israel has repeatedly accused Force 17 of being behind attacks against Israelis.

"precipitated by the provocative Palestinian mortar attacks on Israel."

"He didn't denounce" the Israelis, "he criticized them," Hoenlein said. "By and large, this administration has done the right thing."

Several other Jewish groups agreed with Hoenlein's sentiments — but there were a few exceptions.

The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs came out against Powell's comments, saying the Israeli reaction was both necessary and proportionate to the provocations from Hezbollah and the Palestinians.

Those comments were echoed by the Anti-Defamation League, the Zionist Organization of America and B'nai B'rith.

Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director, said Powell's comments were an "overreaction."

While the statement indeed criticized the Arab attacks that precipitated the crisis, it also made an erroneous judgment about the Israeli action, Foxman said.

Tom Neumann, JINSA's executive director, said he was concerned about the "timidity" of other American Jewish groups, who may have hesitated to stand up to the Bush administration for fear of losing proximity to the new president.

"They're interested in access," Neumann said. "They like shaking hands with the president, they like shaking hands with the senator. They like shaking hands with Arafat, for God's sake."

Ominously, Neumann said, the Arab-American community has recognized the value of speaking with one voice on issues, while the once stable and influential voice of American Jewry has become fractured.

Added to that, he said, is the fact that Jewish groups are growing reluctant to speak their minds for fear of losing their place at the table.

For example, the AJCongress did not issue a press release against Powell's comments — in part because they hope to convince Powell to attend the Congress' annual meeting next month, Baum said.

Tom Smerling, Washington director of the Israel Policy Forum, said American Jewish groups never have kept quiet when they feel strongly about an issue, but are sensitive to the current administration's desire to maintain its standing in the Arab world as an honest broker.

"We use this as an opportunity to encourage them rather than to criticize them," Smerling said.

"It's more important to build a relationship, and I think people are mature enough to realize that."

Roth said access is important because it allows an organization to make its voice heard.

A group that is constantly critical of an administration will be ignored, the Peace Now leader said.

Still, Hoenlein cautioned, "you don't lose access for differences if you do it in the right way and on legitimate grounds."

With the Bush administration still finding its feet, most Jewish leaders said it is too early to openly criticize its Mideast policy.

Many key administration officials are not yet in place, forcing Jewish officials to take a "wait and see" approach.

Powell's criticism must be viewed as just one statement in nearly 100 days of largely positive stances toward Israel, they said.

"It may well be, from time to time, there will be real differences" between the Jewish community and the administration, Baum said. "That's bound to happen. As long as the direction is clear, we can accept that." □

U.S. family sues Palestinians

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The family of an American citizen shot to death by Palestinian terrorists is seeking \$250 million in damages in a lawsuit filed in a Washington court against the Palestinian Authority and its president, Yasser Arafat.

The family of Esh Kodesh Gilmore, who was killed in an Israeli social security office in eastern Jerusalem last year, claims that members of Force 17, Arafat's elite presidential guard, are responsible for his death. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Editor denies anti-Israel bias

The editor of the British newspaper The Guardian took to the pages of London's Jewish Chronicle to defend his newspaper from the charge of being anti-Israel.

Alan Rusbridger said The Guardian, like all newspapers, makes occasional mistakes, but that overall the paper provides "a mosaic of news, features, analysis and comment from all sides." Conrad Black, the owner of the Jerusalem Post, has been among those attacking The Guardian for its Middle East coverage.

Jewish plays mark culture day

Three short Jewish-themed plays will be written and performed in a single day next week in Budapest. The April 22 theaterfest, sponsored by the Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary, is part of a larger Day of Jewish Culture, which also will include an auction of Jewish art.

Solidarity rallies planned

Several hundred Jewish teen-agers from across the United States are expected to rally Sunday in Washington on behalf of Israel.

The rally, across from the White House, is being organized by several leading Jewish youth groups. In another effort, coordinated by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and UJA-Federation of Greater New York, Jewish college students in the New York area will wear blue ribbons and raise funds for Israel next week to show solidarity with the Jewish state.

Students protest at Nazi's home

A group of yeshiva students from Long Island, N.Y., marked Holocaust Remembrance Day by demonstrating outside the home of a Nazi war criminal.

The students from Maimonides High School wanted to draw attention to the fact that the U.S. government has called for the deportation of Michael Gruber, who served as a Nazi SS guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Students at the yeshiva have repeatedly drawn public attention to former Nazis living in the United States and abroad.

Israeli secular leader dies at 46

Ornan Yekutieli, who in recent years headed the secular "Jerusalem Now" movement on the Jerusalem city council, died Wednesday, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. Yekutieli, 46, had been awaiting a heart transplant in a New York hospital for several months. For many years Yekutieli was a member of the left-wing Meretz Party, and led efforts by secular Jerusalemites to resist what they considered Orthodox attempts to impose religious strictures in the city.

At U.S. Holocaust museum, Bush pays homage to the 6 million victims

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush stood with his wife in front of an eternal flame honoring Holocaust victims, and bowed his head.

That silent moment at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on Wednesday night was followed by comments to friends, guests and survivors in the museum's main hall. Bush called the museum "a testament to hope" and said it "bears witness to the best and to the worst of the human heart."

Bush also urged Americans planning to visit Washington to come to the museum. "In places like this, the evidence has been kept. Without it, we might forget the past and we might neglect the future," he said. "The stories we have must be preserved forever."

Bush went on a private tour of the museum for more than an hour Wednesday night, accompanied by museum officials.

The museum had invited Bush to tour the museum at any time, but he requested that the visit take place the night before the official U.S. Holocaust memorial ceremony at the Capitol rotunda Thursday.

In the rotunda, Bush told the hundreds assembled that the Holocaust is "defined as much by the courage of the lost as by the cruelty of the guilty."

The president urged the teaching of conscience, moral discernment, decency and tolerance to stop evil from triumphing.

"This Day of Remembrance marks more than a single historic tragedy, but 6 million important lives — all the possibilities, all the dreams and all the innocence that died with them," he said.

The rotunda event was part of the annual Days of Remembrance for the Holocaust, which has been observed in the United States since 1980. A large gold-colored menorah stood at the front of the room, holding six candles in memory of the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust. A rose was affixed to one of the menorah branches in memory of the gypsies, or Roma, who also were persecuted by the Nazis.

An 11-year-old student at the Maryland School for the Deaf assisted in the candlelighting ceremony in memory of those persecuted because of disabilities.

Holocaust survivors were paired up with Cabinet members or congressmen and women to light the candles. First lady Laura Bush and Hadassah Lieberman — who is the daughter of survivors and the wife of Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) — also participated.

At the rotunda, Ruth Mandel, vice chair of the Holocaust Memorial Council, said the public act of memory serves a larger purpose.

Mandel noted the need to speak out today when there is still evil in the world, such as the threat of genocide in Sudan.

The crimes of the Holocaust show the world that "evil can slip in and blend in, amid the most civilized of surroundings," President Bush said. "In the end, only conscience can stop it, and moral discernment and decency and tolerance."

During his tour, Bush was deeply moved by the pictures on the museum's Tower of Faces and by the exhibit on totalitarianism, according to museum director Sara Bloomfield. Bloomfield accompanied the president, along with Mandel and Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, the chair of the museum council.

The museum is planning a traveling exhibit on book burnings that took place during the Holocaust, and has asked Laura Bush — an advocate for education and literacy — to help plan it. The president and first lady held hands as they stood in front of the eternal flame in the Hall of Remembrance. They then lit candles in memory of those who died in the concentration camps, the names of which encircle the hall.

There were two peculiar moments for the president. As he and his wife went to light the candles, photographers scrambled to get their shot, shattering the quiet and solemnity of the moment. Bush took in it stride and walked to the next part of the museum.

When he arrived at the staircase in the museum's main hall to give his remarks, however, friends and guests cheered and applauded loudly. This time, Bush did not hold his tongue.

"This is a hallowed place," he said. "Please behave yourself." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Young American, Ukrainian Jews join to spread Passover traditions

By Michael J. Jordan

KHMELNITSKI, Ukraine (JTA) — “And you shall tell your children . . .” (Exodus 13:8)

It is the second night of Passover, and here in Ukraine it is the children who must tell their parents.

After 75 years of repressive, anti-clerical communism, Jewish tradition has been flipped on its head, with the younger generations carrying the torch of Jewish observance. In Khmel'nitski, a provincial hub in western Ukraine, a blue-on-white banner draped outside the main theater broadcasts the Jewish celebration: “Happy and Kosher Pesach,” it reads in Cyrillic.

Inside the glass and marble edifice, three communal seders are running simultaneously, in separate lobbies on separate floors.

The previous night, rabbis and emissaries of Chabad Lubavitch ran all three. Tonight, three Ukrainian Jewish students and three American students visiting from Israel are running one seder.

At this seder, some 150 locals are gathered in a dimly lit, low-ceilinged hall. The excitement is palpable.

The student teachers nervously take the podium and begin with a very American ice-breaking tactic: instructing the audience to introduce themselves to their neighbors.

It works, and the tension subsides.

With the Ukrainian Jews leading, the students proceed to explain the meaning of the holiday, the seder plate, the candle-lighting, the kiddush cup and the matzah. It goes smoothly, despite minor glitches: Many begin noshing from the seder plates before each item has been explained, for example.

The evening hits its stride with the start of singing and clapping, and the students are thrilled with the results.

“This is how it ought to be,” says 20-year-old Michael Berkenwald of Mercer Island, Wash., one of 25 North Americans visiting Ukraine while on break from their year of study at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. “Once you get the kids engaged, they’ll engage the parents.”

Irina Akselrud also exults. “I see a lot of people who are really trying to learn, trying to follow,” says the 17-year-old student from the Ukrainian capital, Kiev.

The evening has indeed achieved the primary aim of the Hillel Pesach Project: to spread “Jewish joy” to Jews throughout the former Soviet Union, who in most cases have never experienced such joy. The project is organized by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and is funded by the United Jewish Communities, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation and the JDC.

The program has bloomed exponentially during its five years.

In 1996, the program trained 60 local Jewish students to lead about 60 seders. This year, it prepped 1,000 students to conduct 500 seders in 350 communities, reaching tens of thousands of Jews.

Long term, the hope is that there will no longer be a need for “communal seders” because enough Jews will know the tradition to lead seders at home. Even more meaningful, perhaps — and certainly more moving — is the parallel Project Elijah.

This project delivers matzah, Haggadahs and yiddishkeit to the elderly and infirm who can’t make it to the communal seders.

“It is said that Elijah the Prophet visits every Jewish home,”

says Hillel Associate Vice President Rabbi Yossi Goldman, who founded the Hillel FSU and both Pesach projects. “It’s a wonderful way to connect the grandparents, who are so lonely, with the wider Jewish community.” The polarity between young and old illuminates the revival of Jewish life in Ukraine.

Jewish communities throughout the ex-Communist world are experiencing varying degrees of renaissance, but it is especially dramatic to behold in Ukraine.

Thousands of North American Jews trace their roots to the shtetls and cities of Ukraine. It also produced perhaps the worst pre-Nazi genocide of Jews; from 1648 to 1658, some 100,000 were slaughtered here. Khmel'nitski, in fact, is named for the peasant leader who was a central figure in the massacres.

Despite the hundreds of thousands who have emigrated in recent years, Ukraine today boasts Europe’s third largest Jewish population, estimated at 500,000.

For many, their only connection to their Jewishness in Soviet times was the stamp in their identification papers — “Evrei” — or the anti-Semitism sanctioned by the state and dished out on the streets. Even today, locals say, a kippah-wearing Jew might walk about unmolested in Kiev, but is likely to take some blows in a city like Lvov, the nationalist hotbed in western Ukraine.

One 19-year-old woman, Zhenia Ponomarenko, said a high school classmate in Kiev told her a few years ago to “go to Zhidland,” or Israel. Zhid is an insult here, translated as “dirty Jew.”

However, members of the younger generation generally are not saddled with the baggage of the past. They appear curious and hungry to learn all that was kept from their parents.

Most do so through Hillels or through Kiev’s 1,300-student International Solomon University, the formal institution of Jewish learning. Through their experiences at Solomon or Hillel, many young Ukrainian Jews have discovered a calling.

The students said they had not become “religious,” only newly observant of some Jewish traditions, like lighting Shabbat candles.

Their enthusiasm and commitment did not go unnoticed by the North Americans.

“Our Judaism is handed to us on a silver platter and is at our fingertips,” said Michelle Dardashti, 20, who grew up in Baltimore. “But these people have had to seek it out. And their becoming more Jewish is making the community more Jewish.”

The students came bearing matzah and Haggadahs. The hosts responded with plaintive apologies for not being able to afford food or drink; generous hospitality is a cornerstone of Ukrainian culture.

The students asked about the hosts’ “Jewish memories.” Most recounted vignettes about their childhoods, families, traditions, or Jewish schooling. It didn’t take much to bring tears.

One man spoke of the odes he wrote to matzah. A man in his 70s, with a single swatch of red hair across his bald pate, burst forth with two Yiddish songs, wiping the tears from his cheeks.

The emotion was even more evident when the students began singing “Mah Nishtanah,” “Dayeinu” and “Shalom Aleichem.” The hosts either mouthed the words, sang along or smiled enormously.

When it was over, the hosts felt unable to express their gratitude. A one-legged man who hosted a seder with the only other Jews in his village — his son and grandson — told the visitors, “I dreamt this day would one day come; now it has finally happened.” □

(JTA Staff Writer Michael J. Jordan recently visited Ukraine on a trip sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.)