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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli killed in roadside ambush

Hamas claimed responsibility for a roadside ambush in the West Bank on Tuesday in which an Israeli was killed. The slain driver was identified as Assaf Hershkovitz from the Jewish settlement of Ofra.

His father, Aryeh, was killed in another West Bank drive-by shooting in January. [Page 1]

Peres: Work needed on cease-fire

Israel and the Palestinians have reached "an understanding" on a cease-fire, but it isn't yet a written agreement, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Monday after meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in New York. [Page 1]

Parents of JCC victim sue

The parents of a boy who was shot by a white supremacist at a Jewish day-care center filed a lawsuit claiming the center's owners failed to provide adequate security to prevent hate crimes.

Eleanor and Charles Kadish claim the Los Angeles-area North Valley Jewish Community Center was targeted because of its lack of security. Benjamin Kadish, 5, was one of three boys injured, along with a teen-age girl and a woman, when Buford Furrow fired more than 70 bullets into the center in August 1999.

State Dept. releases terror report

Iran continues to top the list of countries accused of state-sponsored terrorism, according to the U.S. State Department's annual report on global terrorism.

Released Monday, the report includes Israel's accusation that Palestinian Authority forces take part in terror attacks against Israeli targets. A U.S. official said the inclusion of the Israeli viewpoint shows the United States believes the accusations have merit.

Olympic victims' kin reject offer

The families of 11 Israeli athletes killed after being taken hostage by Palestinian gunmen at the 1972 Munich Olympics said they were outraged at a 6 million mark compensation offer made by a German official. "Have you heard of a connotation worse than 6 million marks?" said Ilana Romano of the offer, made Monday in Jerusalem.

Romano, whose husband, Yosef, was one of the victims, said, "We want a symbolic amount of 11 million. Eleven, because it was 11 sportsmen."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sharon says 'no talks under fire,' but talks about talks intensifying

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Many Israelis felt let down and even a bit embarrassed as Foreign Minister Shimon Peres spoke of a possible cease-fire during meetings in Washington and New York this week, while Palestinian violence continued to take its toll back home.

On Tuesday, Israelis were shocked when Assaf Hershkovitz, a young father from the West Bank settlement of Ofra, was gunned down near Ramallah by Palestinian terrorists. Only three months ago, Hershkovitz's own father, Aryeh, was killed in chillingly similar circumstances.

Over the weekend there was a surge of optimism prompted by Peres' diplomatic meetings in Egypt and Jordan. With each passing day, however, the optimism waned as Palestinian shootings and mortar attacks continued unabated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. After meeting with Peres in Cairo on Sunday, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was quick to tell the world that Israel and the Palestinians had reached a cease-fire agreement.

He had to be corrected by Peres, who wriggled uncomfortably in semantic distinctions, saying Monday that Israel and the Palestinians had reached "an understanding" on a cease-fire, but not yet a written agreement.

Mubarak, enraged, accused Israel of tricking him, while Israeli sources said Mubarak's announcement had been a ploy to impose a fait accompli on Israel.

Even the vague understanding that apparently was reached toward stopping violence and resuming negotiations was barely honored.

Despite the disappointment and frustration, however, there seems to be movement on the diplomatic front for the first time since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took office in early March.

Sharon's policy of "no talking under fire" — no negotiations while Palestinian violence continues — has now been modified to permit talking about ending the violence, and talking about how to resume talking.

While the initial results are negligible, there may be grounds for encouragement because diplomats in the region — and in Washington — are more active than they have been for months in seeking to defuse the intifada.

Peres points out that talking with the Egyptians and the Jordanians about their joint initiative to end the fighting — even if it is based primarily on a Palestinian plan — does not contravene the "no talking under fire" policy because Egypt and Jordan are not the ones firing on Israel. Moreover, Peres' meetings in Cairo and Amman on Sunday, prior to his trip to the United States, were preceded by discreet conversations between Israeli and Palestinian officials, not all of which are public knowledge.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat himself, in an interview with the British newspaper The Guardian on Monday, referred to Sharon's son, Omri, as his "hot line" to the Israeli premier. He also implied that his meetings with Omri, which have been criticized by Israel's attorney general as a breach of state protocol, are more frequent than the Israeli public knows.

A crucial element in the ongoing developments is Peres' ability to work harmoniously with Sharon. Their relationship is becoming a fulcrum around which Israeli policy and international diplomacy revolve.

When the unity government was established, correspondents referred to the "odd couple" — two septuagenarians whose friendship and political rivalry go back a half a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Explosions kill Palestinians

An explosion Monday night in Ramallah leveled an apartment building near Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's West Bank headquarters. Three people were killed, including two children.

Palestinians blamed Israel for the blast, but Israel said the explosions were set off accidentally by Palestinian militants preparing bombs intended for use against Israel.

In another development, two Hamas terrorists were killed Monday when a bomb exploded in a van in the Gaza Strip. Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer denied that Israel was involved, saying the bomb went off prematurely before the terrorists could employ it against Israelis.

The Palestinians "are blaming us. There is no limit to their audacity. It's them, them, them," he said.

Barak questioned on fund raising

Israeli police questioned former Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Monday as part of a criminal investigation of his 1999 election campaign fund raising.

Prosecutors allege that Barak's Labor Party set up nonprofit groups that took in foreign contributions and illegally funneled them to Barak's campaign coffers.

Arab politician to be investigated

Israeli police are planning to investigate a leading Israeli Arab politician for organizing visits to hostile countries, according to Ha'aretz.

Azmi Beshara's office said the visits are for Israeli Arabs who want to visit their relatives in Syria.

A bank grows in New York

Israel's Bank Hapoalim has opened six branches in New York.

The bank's Signature Bank subsidiary is providing banking and brokerage services at five offices in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn.



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century. Many observers wrote then that the stability and longevity of the Sharon government ultimately would depend on the pair's ability to set aside their deep political differences and work side by side.

But even the most optimistic commentators hardly predicted the close working relationship that seems to be developing.

Indeed, comparisons were drawn this week between the Rabin-Peres relationship in the 1992 government — which ultimately produced the Oslo accords with the Palestinians and the peace treaty with Jordan — and the present collaboration between Sharon and Peres. The enigma, of course, remains Sharon himself.

The Israel Defense Force's brief incursion into the Gaza Strip two weeks ago seemed like vintage Sharon. Its withdrawal within hours, following stiff international pressure, seemed to epitomize a new, moderate Sharon.

That moderate Sharon, together with Peres, appears to be coordinating the delicate diplomatic effort to end the intifada before it spirals out of control and drags the region into wider war. But no amount of moderation and sagacity on the Israeli side can be effective if — as some analysts fear — there is no authoritative power on the Palestinian side, or at least no will to end the violence.

This week, for example, there was reportedly talk within the Palestinian Authority of disbanding the Tanzim militias, the armed wing of Arafat's own Fatah movement. With the Tanzim leading the fight against Israel — and Palestinian opinion polls showing great popular support for armed struggle — there is no certainty that an order from Arafat to disband the militias would be obeyed.

Arafat claims to have ordered a cessation of violence in recent weeks, though the Tanzim and other groups deny this.

With violence continuing, the conclusion is either that Arafat's orders no longer carry weight with the Palestinian militias — or that his apparent moves toward moderation are primarily for international consumption. □

Even though he's not Jewish, UCLA football player keeps kosher

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — When Eyoseph Esi Efseaff arrived at UCLA's campus on a football recruiting visit, he startled the coaches with an unexpected request: His food had to be strictly kosher — even though Efseaff isn't Jewish.

Unfortunately it was a Friday evening, and the frantic coaches learned that all nearby kosher restaurants were closed for Shabbat. Finally, they tracked down some prepackaged kosher meals at the UCLA hospital.

The 6-foot-3-inch, 282-pound offensive lineman, now an 18-year-old freshman at UCLA, is a Russian Molokan, one of a group of Christian dissidents who broke away from the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century. They refused to recognize the religious supremacy of the czar and they follow the Bible literally — including its dietary laws, although most do not have their meat ritually slaughtered.

Because of their beliefs, they were persecuted and forced to resettle in other parts of the Russian Empire — in southern Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia and eastern Russia, where many still reside.

In Russian, Molokan means "milk drinker," a moniker that began after Molokans defied the prescribed Orthodox fast days by drinking milk.

Efseaff's great-grandparents immigrated from Russia to California, where most of the estimated 20,000 Molokans in the United States live.

An outstanding football and track star in his high school near Fresno, Calif., Efseaff says he picked UCLA because the presence of a small Molokan and large Jewish community in Los Angeles would assure a ready supply of kosher food.

On campus, he orders his weekly supply of kosher food on Mondays, stores it in a small refrigerator in his dormitory room and microwaves the meals as needed.

On the road, the team flies in kosher food if it's not available locally, and Efseaff brings along his own paper plates and plastic utensils. Efseaff, who graduated from high school with a 3.9 grade point average, is planning on a career in sports medicine.

He has already ruled out a future in professional football: Most NFL games are on Sundays, and he will not play on his religion's day of rest. □

JEWISH WORLD

NEWS ANALYSIS

One good cop, one bad cop: The dynamics of Peres and Sharon

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel's conditions for resuming peace talks with the Palestinians seem to change depending on who is delivering the message.

In a new take on an old strategy, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres are talking differently — but, in fact, their overall strategies are very much the same.

"In any negotiations, it's often advantageous to have a good cop and a bad cop," said Tom Smerling, Washington director of the Israel Policy Forum.

In their appearances before American audiences, Sharon and Peres have adhered to their scripts. Sharon is the classic bad cop, setting strong limits for the Palestinians and drawing clear lines in the sand.

"I don't speak about reduction of hostilities. It should be a full cessation of hostility," Sharon told members of the Anti-Defamation League's annual leadership meeting Monday via satellite from Jerusalem. "It should be quiet."

Peres, in the United States this week to present Israel's views on the Middle East conflict, has been more sympathetic, listening and negotiating with the Palestinians and their Arab neighbors and giving Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat a little breathing room.

Interviewed on Monday by PBS-TV's Charlie Rose, Peres said that despite Sharon's rhetoric, he believes the prime minister will make some concessions for peace.

"I think he's responsible enough and mature enough to understand that we have to take the necessary means, some of them very painful, in order to bring an end to the violence," said Peres, a former prime minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Despite Sharon's vow that he will not negotiate while Palestinian violence continues, Peres has been doing just that, spending Sunday shuttling between Cairo and Amman to discuss a proposed Egyptian-Jordanian plan for a cease-fire. Peres has explained that he is not violating Sharon's vow since neither Egypt nor Jordan is firing on Israel — although their proposal was drafted together with the Palestinians, some of whom are firing on Israel.

The duo give very different answers when asked about U.S. involvement in efforts to stop the violence.

"I personally believe that most of the negotiations and talks should be bilateral," Sharon told the ADL audience, effectively ruling out a U.S. role at present. "Basically, I think maybe that the best thing is to try and let the sides, first of all, to solve bilaterally the problems" facing Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

By contrast, Peres spoke Monday of "a division of labor" that would include a U.S. role. He spoke of "an important American involvement" that would help the two sides "negotiate directly, face to face."

Israeli observers believe the Sharon-Peres dynamic is more a matter of personality than strategy.

"It's not like they sat down and planned it this way," said Steven Spiegel, professor of political science at the University of California at Los Angeles.

When an opportunity comes along like the Egyptian-Jordanian plan, it is Sharon's first instinct to say no, while it is Peres' first instinct to say yes. Then they find the middle ground, Spiegel said. Sharon "is very happy to have Peres," Spiegel said. "He deeply needed someone like Peres."

Smerling said the two leaders "respect, but suspect" each other. They are both old-style political heavyweights and have the ability to hold their own against each other. "Neither of them, when they were in the junior ranks, felt constrained by their prime minister," Smerling said.

For Sharon — who has angered members of his right-wing constituency by not being more aggressive — Peres represents an escape valve, enabling the government to negotiate without Sharon having to do it personally.

Although some Israeli observers think the good cop-bad cop dichotomy is a result of genuine differences, others say it is all part of the game. "In politics, in the real world, you never push someone into a corner," said an Israeli official in Washington. □

Rumsfeld urged on Sinai troops

Americans for Peace Now wrote to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, urging the Pentagon to "consider broad U.S. interests" before deciding to remove U.S. peacekeepers stationed in the Sinai.

"The elimination of U.S. participation" in the international force "could have a negative impact" on "stability along the Israeli-Egyptian border, which is particularly important at a time of heightened tension in the Middle East," the letter stated.

Minn. probes anti-Jewish charge

Higher education officials in Minnesota recently asked the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate allegations of anti-Semitism at St. Cloud State University.

A former instructor charges that he was not considered for a teaching position because he is Jewish, and several other former and current faculty members and former students say there was a "hostile environment" for Jews at the school, located 65 miles north of Minneapolis.

The state officials' request, which is likely to be accepted by the EEOC, is a "crucial first step," said Stephen Silberfarb, the executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

Hillel habla español

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life opened its first branch in Latin America.

The center in Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, will serve an estimated 2,000 Jewish students in three universities in the South American country.

Hillel also has affiliates at universities in North America, Europe, Australia, the former Soviet Union and Israel.

More jail time in vote fraud?

Six British legislators called for harsher sentences for a pair of fervently Orthodox local government politicians convicted of vote fraud last month.

Isaac Leibowitz, of the Conservative Party, was sentenced to six months in prison, while Liberal Democrat Zev Lieberman was given four months.

The six Labor legislators asked the attorney general to file an appeal seeking longer sentences for the two.

Ukraine education forum opens

A three-day conference on Jewish education in Ukraine began Monday in Kiev.

The conference, sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, brought together some 250 people teaching at the preschool to university level in both secular and religious school systems.

New Ellis Island Internet site features treasure trove of records

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's virtually "genealogy for dummies."

In a nation of immigrants where more than 35 percent of the population — or 100 million Americans — has at least one ancestor who passed through Ellis Island, officials at the historic entry point to New York have unveiled a new Web site that will enable even the least tech-savvy to mine a motherlode of information on their family's roots.

"This marks an immigrant's first footstep in America, and provides information leading back to Europe and forward into America," said Peg Zitko, spokeswoman for The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.

Some immigrants, she said, "were very specific about which street they lived on in Kiev and which street they were going to in Cleveland."

The treasure trove of data, which is accessible on the Web at www.ellislandrecords.org, is being gobbled up by a public that reportedly ranks "family history research" among its favorite interests. As soon as it opened at 6 p.m., April 17, the Web site averaged 27,000 hits per second, and recorded 26 million hits in its first 54 hours, Zitko said.

So much interest overwhelmed the system that only one in seven would-be genealogists was able to access the site, she said.

The bottleneck eased somewhat this week as additional database servers quadrupled the site's memory.

The site promises to revolutionize the field of genealogy with the depth of and access to information that it offers.

Experienced researchers also are happy to save hours formerly spent scrolling tediously through microfilm.

"Our ancestors are for the most part forgotten, but doing this brings a part of them back," said Adam Bronstein, who serves on the executive council of the New York-based Jewish Genealogical Society.

Bronstein was impressed with the site in the brief time he gained access, but said he would have preferred an "advanced search function" to do a more detailed search.

Still, he understood the need for a utilitarian approach: "I could see how they'd dummy it up for people who have never done this," Bronstein said. Indeed, as Zitko said, "the database was designed to be user-friendly, not something complicated."

The Web site contains records of the 17 million immigrants — and 5 million other travelers and crew members — who passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1924.

Online records will display details in as many as 11 "fields" — an immigrant's given name; surname; ethnicity; town and country of last residence; date of arrival; age on arrival; gender; marital status; ship number; port of departure; and line number on the ship's manifest. In some cases, information may include the immigrant's occupation and mother tongue.

Perhaps most remarkably, the foundation has scanned 3 million pages of manifests and photos of 800 ships that docked at Ellis Island — some 85 percent of the total.

For a fee, the foundation will provide an image of the precise page that lists one's ancestor, and of the ship they traveled on.

Crucial to the project were the 5.6 million hours logged by 12,000 volunteers from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints. The Mormons, as they are known, are renowned for their keen interest in genealogy and their involvement in documenting Americans' roots.

While the Mormon pursuit of "posthumous baptisms" raises some concern among Jews, many Jews are grateful for the time and effort the Mormons have invested in the Ellis Island project.

"Theirs was a significant gift, and it really cannot be underestimated," Zitko said. "They saved the foundation millions of dollars."

Visitors to the site are asked to enter a relative's name, and the search begins.

In some cases, however, this can be tricky. Names in Cyrillic, for example, might have numerous possible phonetic spellings in English. A name like Moskovich might also be spelled as Moskovich, Moskovitch, Moscovic, Moscovich or Moscovitch. Users therefore are advised to try several variations.

They also are warned not to believe one of the great myths of U.S. immigration history: that many names were Americanized and simplified at Ellis Island.

If names were changed, it happened in the old country or after the immigrant's arrival in America — not at the point of entry, Bronstein said.

"The names were written out on the tickets where they were purchased, with the original information, and the ship's clerk would transcribe it," Bronstein said. "You'll never see a manifest that was adulterated. It's just like at the Division of Motor Vehicles; a clerk would never change a name just to make it easier to pronounce."

The database itself is not foolproof.

Zitko conceded that some records may be missing, handwritten records may have been misinterpreted, and humans may have erred when entering information into the database.

"There's no way to guarantee you'll find your family's records here," she said.

"But we can guarantee an interesting search experience. It's about the adventure of the search."

For those Americans determined to pencil in the family tree, Zitko, Bronstein and others offer a further caution: The Web site is not a panacea that will unearth the entire tree with a simple click of a mouse.

While a significant launching point, the Ellis Island site is only the first step. Old-fashioned leg work still will be needed to fill in other gaps — from microfilm of U.S. censuses or naturalization documents or records at the national archives or county clerk's office.

And, of course, primary sources shouldn't be overlooked.

"This site is great," Bronstein said, "but you can't replace going to bubbe and zayda and hearing the real-life stories." □

Students fund Schindler plaque

NEW YORK (JTA) — Non-Jewish students and faculty at a Michigan college are behind a plaque slated to be unveiled next month at the site of Oskar Schindler's factory in Poland, according to the Detroit Jewish News.

People at Albion College raised most of the \$3,000 for the plaque after touring the Jewish section of Krakow, Poland, in 1999.

As part of a trip to Poland for the May 12 event, the students will help restore a Jewish cemetery and will visit the Auschwitz death camp. □