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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jews ask pope to condemn Assad

American Jewish leaders called on Pope John Paul II to break his silence and reject Syrian President Bashar Assad's comments that Jews betrayed Jesus and that Christians and Muslims should unite against Jews.

"If there's one thing we've learned from the 1930s, it's that words — especially the words of leaders — have consequences," said longtime interfaith activist Rabbi A. James Rudin.

Meanwhile, the pope called on the people of the Middle East to put aside their hostility and seek peace and harmony during a visit to the remains of the Syrian city of Kuneitra on the Golan Heights.

Syria has refused to rebuild the city, which was destroyed in two Arab-Israeli wars.

Syria says Kuneitra should be a monument to Israeli "crimes" until all of the Golan is returned to Syria.

Sharon sorry for baby's death

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon apologized after Israeli troops killed a Palestinian infant girl when they shelled the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

The girl's mother, grandmother and three siblings were wounded in Monday's shelling. [Page 1]

State Dept. blasts Assad

The U.S. State Department lashed out at Bashar Assad after the Syrian president said in a speech welcoming the pope to Syria on Saturday that Israel was oppressing the Palestinians and compared it to the way the Jews had "betrayed" Jesus and the Prophet Mohammad.

"There's no place from anyone or from any side for statements that inflame religious passions and hatred," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday.

IDF briefly enters Tulkarm

The Israel Defense Force briefly entered the Palestinian-controlled city of Tulkarm during exchanges of fire with West Bank gunmen.

The troops struck a Palestinian police post from which they had been fired at, according to an IDF official.

One Palestinian was reported killed during the firefight.

Israel intercepts weapons boat carrying missiles, rockets to Gaza

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli warnings that the Palestinians seek to escalate their violence appeared to be substantiated this week when the navy intercepted a Lebanese boat carrying Katyusha rockets, anti-aircraft missiles and other weapons bound for the Gaza Strip.

"We are witness recently to a weapons smuggling process never seen before, and you will soon be surprised to hear in what kinds and quantities," Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer told a meeting of Labor Party legislators on Monday shortly before defense officials announced the boat seizure.

"The assessment is that at this point the leadership in the territories is not seeking a dialogue," he said, referring to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Navy Commander Yedidya Ya'ari told a news conference in Haifa later Monday that the cache pointed to a clear intent by the Palestinians to raise the confrontation with Israel to a new level.

"It is clear from what you see before you that these items would alter the balance of forces in our current fighting against the Palestinians," Ya'ari said.

The weapons on the boat were more sophisticated than those used by the Palestinians in the conflict so far — and included arms such as rockets and mortars that the Oslo accords forbid the Palestinian Authority from having.

Some of the weapons, such as the Katyusha rockets, have a range of about five miles.

They would give Gaza gunmen the ability to reach major cities inside Israel.

The anti-aircraft missiles could hit Israeli planes and helicopters inside Israel as well, reports said.

Other weapons in the cache included anti-tank rockets, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, anti-personnel mines, explosives and ammunition for Kalashnikov assault rifles.

Ya'ari said the weapons appeared to have been sent from northern Lebanon by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command, a militant group led in Lebanon by Ahmed Jibril.

The vessel was spotted Saturday by an Israeli air patrol, which asked navy boats to take a closer look.

Ya'ari said the air patrol was in part the result of an assessment by Israel's defense establishment that the Palestinians might try to smuggle arms into Gaza by sea.

He said those onboard the captured boat appeared to be professional smugglers from Lebanon who were planning to drop the weapons in sealed containers at a rendezvous point in the water, where they would then be picked up.

Israeli media said the boat was intercepted outside Israeli territorial waters off the coast of northern Israel.

The disclosure came following a day of widespread clashes between Israeli troops and armed Palestinians, including the Israel Defense Force's shelling of the Khan Yunis refugee camp in Gaza that killed a Palestinian infant.

The girl's mother, grandmother and three siblings were wounded in Monday's shelling.

The IDF said it was responding to Palestinian mortar attacks on Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon apologized for the death of five-month-old Iman Hije, and said the IDF is under instruction to prevent civilian casualties.

"Children and babies should not be involved in this terrible war," the prime minister

MIDEAST FOCUS

Separate paths for Lag B'Omer

Israel's Religious Affairs Ministry plans to arrange separate walking paths for men and women expected to take part in the traditional pilgrimage to Mount Miron during Friday's Lag B'Omer festival.

Legislator Naomi Hazan of the secular Meretz Party protested the move, which was prompted by the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reported.

Bombing may have gone awry

A powerful explosion was heard near a West Bank settlement in what Israeli security officials said could have been caused by a bomb that prematurely detonated when terrorists tried to plant it.

Israel Defense Force troops who arrived at the site near Shavei Shomron found bloodstains on the side of the road and the remains of an explosive charge.

Immigration to Israel down

The chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel said that if aliyah continues its downward trend, only some 52,000 new immigrants are expected to arrive in Israel this year. Sallai Meridor also said that a number of factors have contributed to the drop-off in immigration from former Soviet states, including the improving political and economic situation there and the ongoing violence in Israel.

Bill would keep 2 Shi'ites in jail

Israeli legislators debated a proposed bill that would allow Israel to continue holding two Lebanese Shi'ite leaders as bargaining chips for the return of missing and captured Israeli soldiers.

The legislation would circumvent a high court ruling barring their continued detention by allowing the Israeli chief of staff to declare Mustafa Dirani and Sheik Obeid fighters in an illegal, hostile organization whose release would endanger state security.



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said. Israel's Channel Two Television reported that Sharon planned to dispatch his son, Omri, for an urgent meeting with Arafat to try to calm tensions.

The High Court of Justice ruled Sunday that Sharon's son, who is not a civil servant, could act as an informal liaison to the Palestinians on condition that each mission receives prior approval from the attorney general. The Movement for Quality Government in Israel had petitioned the court, trying to prevent Omri Sharon from involvement in affairs of state.

Palestinian and Arab television stations broadcast photos of the infant and footage of the wounded family throughout the day.

Arafat's Fatah movement said it would convene an emergency session in Gaza on Monday night to discuss a response to the infant's death.

Fatah officials said the Palestinians must respond by escalating their violence.

In other violence Monday, Palestinian gunmen in a passing car opened fire from a Palestinian area on a border police patrol in Jerusalem's southern Har Homa neighborhood. No one was hurt in the attack.

Reports said there also were exchanges of fire between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen at Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem.

In addition, exchanges of fire with Israeli troops reportedly occurred south of Hebron on Monday night in which a Palestinian security officer was killed and two Palestinian policemen wounded.

In the Knesset, the prime minister told legislators at the opening of the summer session that the conflict with the Palestinians is a prolonged, complicated one. He reiterated that there would be no resumption of political dialogue until the violence and terrorism stops.

"Israel is facing one of the most fateful and important tests in its history," Sharon said.

"Before talking peace, the shooting must stop. When there is shooting, there are no concessions."

Appealing directly to the Palestinian people, Sharon said, "All of your achievements were gotten through negotiations. All of the tragedies through violence."

In his address to lawmakers, opposition leader Yossi Sarid assailed Sharon.

"He has no plan, he has no vision and he has no peace," Sarid said. "Three months ago, we experienced the greatest political fraud of all time — that there is a treatment for the pain, that security can be restored. But it is a colossal fraud." □

Czech students upset at decision to cancel seminars with neo-Nazis

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A decision to cancel seminars on political extremism that featured representatives of neo-Nazi organizations is creating controversy at the Czech Republic's most prestigious university.

The decision by officials at Charles University in Prague followed a recent seminar for political science students attended by leading far-right figures — including one man accused by Prague Jewish officials of having been involved in an attack on the city's Old-New Synagogue.

The dispute comes amid an apparent rise in hate crimes in the Czech Republic in recent years.

A dean at the college, Petr Kolar, took disciplinary measures against seminar organizer Zdenek Zboril, arguing that the university is no place for extremist views.

"There is no room for discussion with extremists," Kolar said. "I am a great supporter of the study of extremism in this country, but we cannot do it by allowing extremists to express their views freely on academic ground."

Zboril — who has studied extremist activity in the Czech Republic for several years, in the process amassing thousands of neo-Nazi items, including musical recordings — described the decision to halt the seminars as "very wrong."

"I hate neo-Nazis, but it is simply not possible to ostracize them and kick them out of society. Efforts should be made to integrate them rather than ignore them," he said.

Others have questioned the dean's decision, including eight students who attended the course and a member of the university's governing body. □

JEWISH WORLD

New leader of Berlin's Jews plans focus on Soviet emigres

JTA Staff Report

BERLIN (JTA) — In his first public remarks since being elected president of Berlin's Jewish community, Alexander Brenner has condemned the "latent anti-Semitism" in Germany reflected in news reporting on Israel.

Anti-Israel sentiment in the German media "has awakened bad memories," Brenner said.

"Every Jew already hears in his head the next step: Instead of 'Don't buy from Jews,' it is 'Don't buy from Israelis,'" he told the Berliner Zeitung daily, referring to the 1933 Nazi boycotts of Jewish businesses in Germany.

"Jews can stand on their heads — it won't get rid of anti-Semitism," he said. "I see the discussion about Israel as a vent for latent anti-Semitism in this country."

Brenner, who announced his candidacy late in the campaign, ousted incumbent Andreas Nachama, 49, in Jewish community elections last week. Observers said Nachama lost the election because he had not responded strongly enough to the needs of ex-Soviet constituents.

Though he won a majority of the popular vote in March, thus securing a place on the community council, Nachama did not have enough support to be re-elected to the board, winning only eight of 21 votes.

The board, which consists entirely of Eastern European or Russian Jews, voted decisively for Brenner, who has promised to devote himself to new immigrants' needs.

Brenner, 71, said he will work to help Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union learn about Jewish tradition, history and religion.

"If we want our children or grandchildren to stay Jewish, we have to introduce them to these important values," he said in a radio interview.

The Berlin Jewish community, Germany's largest, has increased from about 6,000 to roughly 12,000 during the last 10 years with the arrival of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

With the influx of the tens of thousands of Jews, Germany's Jewish community has grown from 35,000 to at least 90,000 in the last decade, making it the only growing Jewish population in Europe today.

Many of the new immigrants know little about Judaism, however, because all religious practice in the Soviet Union was suppressed under communism.

The Berlin election took place on May 2, when the Jewish community's 21-member Council of Representatives chose the five-member board and three deputies. The new board then chose Brenner as president.

A shopkeeper's son, Brenner was born in a Polish village near the Ukrainian border.

When he was 11, Brenner, his parents and sister were forced to resettle in Siberia. After World War II, the family was sent back to Poland.

His parents and sister emigrated to Israel, but Brenner went to Berlin and studied chemistry and physics.

Brenner began his career as a research scientist with Germany's Federal Institute of Health.

He then entered the foreign service, working in the Research Ministry, as a diplomat in Moscow and Berlin and lastly as science attache of the German embassy in Israel.

Brenner speaks several languages fluently, including English, Russian, Hebrew, Polish and Yiddish.

Joel Levy, a longtime U.S. diplomat who served in the foreign service in Germany before becoming the founding chairman of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Berlin, called Brenner "a very accomplished diplomat who knows" Eastern Europe "extremely well and therefore will be a major force for the integration of Russian Jews in the Berlin Jewish community."

Outgoing president Nachama, ordained last year as a liberal rabbi, said he probably would return to work as a historian with the Topography of Terror Foundation, an archive and memorial exhibit on the history of the Gestapo in Berlin.

The community elected Nachama president in 1997. During his tenure, the community gave its support to an egalitarian congregation and secured contracts for the city's first two female cantors. □

Springtime for Tony nods

The Broadway production of Mel Brooks' "The Producers," about a pair of Broadway producers who try to make a fortune by staging a flop musical about Hitler and the Nazis — only to see it become a colossal hit — earned a record 15 Tony nominations.

The hit show, which has already broken box office records since it opened last month, received nominations for stars Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick.

Brooks himself received nominations for best score, best book and as one of the show's many producers. The Tony awards will be presented June 3.

Powell to Arabs: U.S. will not rest

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell vowed to Arab American leaders that the United States would keep working to end Israeli-Palestinian violence. "We will not rest because the stakes are too high," Powell said Saturday at a dinner for the Arab American Institute Foundation.

Ukrainian man faces deportation

A Ukrainian-born man faces possible deportation for allegedly hiding his Nazi past when he came to Canada after World War II.

Helmut Oberlander, 77, allegedly served with a Nazi death squad that murdered thousands of Jews and others in German-occupied territories.

Chicago Jews march for Israel

Some 6,000 members of Chicago's Jewish community took part in a march Sunday to show their support for the Jewish state.

The walk "provided our local Jewish community with an important forum to express solidarity with our Israeli brothers and sisters," said Steven Nasatir, president of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

Britain bends for M.D. students

Orthodox Jewish medical students in Britain will be allowed to take examinations on the day before they are held for other students. Observant students have found it difficult to qualify for the Diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists because exams are normally held only on Saturdays.

Rabbi makes ordination pitch

A U.S. rabbi celebrated the 20th anniversary of her ordination by throwing out the first pitch at Sunday's Baltimore Orioles-New York Yankees baseball game.

Reform Rabbi Mindy Avra Portnoy of Washington's Temple Sinai is a lifelong baseball fan who told the congregation that throwing out the pitch would fulfill a lifelong dream.

Mexican president Fox, in address, links Jewish, Mexican immigrants

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Barry Jacobs, a Foreign Service officer for 28 years and now director of strategic studies for the American Jewish Committee, learned that Mexican President Vicente Fox was to speak at the group's annual dinner, he was more than surprised.

"It's mind-blowing," said Jacobs, who serves as the AJCommittee's liaison to the Mexican Jewish community. "It was an incredible honor that he flew up for this event."

Fox was eager to participate in the May 3 dinner, according to AJCommittee officials. In his speech, drew parallels between Jewish immigrants who left Europe seeking a better life in America and Mexicans who are moving to the United States for the same purpose.

"One feature stands out throughout history as a determining factor in the shaping of the character of the Jewish people — the experience of migration," Fox said. "Time and again, Jewish communities had to travel to distant lands in search of a better life."

"In a sense, although for reasons very different from those of the Jewish people, Mexico has also become a country of migrants who, through their skills and hard work, contribute to the prosperity and cultural life of the communities where they have settled, particularly in the United States," Fox said.

Fox's well-received speech — indeed, his mere presence at the event — reflects the growing importance that Mexico's 40,000 Jews have obtained in their country, say observers.

When AJCommittee leaders visited Mexico in October and invited Fox, then the president-elect, to speak at their dinner, he accepted immediately.

"It says that the president of Mexico, notwithstanding the size of the community, understands that a Jewish community adds quality to any country," said Shula Bahat, AJCommittee's acting executive director.

Jacobs said several members of Fox's Cabinet have some Jewish background, even though Jews make up less than half of 1 percent of Mexico's population.

"The importance of the Jewish community in Mexico is that they are a small community doing well economically," Jacobs said.

Jews moved to Mexico largely as an alternative to the United States and Palestine at the turn of the 20th century, and have established a strong community, primarily in Mexico City.

Executives at a leading Jewish organization in Mexico say the community's political clout has grown in recent years. They note the important role Jews play in American politics, as well as Fox's well-known desire to emulate America in both the economic and diplomatic arenas, as reasons for Fox's appearance last week.

That, coupled with Fox's friendship with President Bush, has opened new doors for the Jewish community in the political realm.

"We are very active in different areas of the national agenda," said Renee Dayan Shabot, director of Tribuna Israelita, a leading Mexican Jewish community organization. "We have a close relationship with government officials, particularly in different projects that the new government has launched," mentioning welfare reform as an example.

Bahat said the AJCommittee is doing mentoring projects with Tribuna Israelita.

The AJCommittee also is urging leaders around the world to

embrace their countries' Jewish communities, no matter how small.

"Jewish communities around the world serve as a beacon, because the way a society treats its Jewish community says a lot about that society," Bahat said.

Fox echoed those comments.

"Today, Mexico and the United States are intricately bound by the profound ties that unite Mexican and Mexican-American communities with their country of origin," he said. "But we also have strong ties between our respective Jewish communities, which on a daily basis work for the benefit of our nations."

Many American Jewish leaders have expressed surprise with the warm relationship Bush has developed with the organized Jewish community in his first 100 days in office.

In his own speech to the AJCommittee, Bush emphasized the need for religious freedom around the world and chastised countries that engage in religious persecution, singling out Sudan and China.

"The story of Exodus still speaks across the millennium," Bush said. "No society in all of history can be justly built on the backs of slaves."

He noted the human right improvements of several countries — including Morocco and Jordan — but pushed for others to do more to protect Jews and other religious minorities.

"It is not an accident that freedom of religion is one of the central freedoms in our Bill of Rights," Bush said. "It is the first freedom of the human soul, the right to speak the words that God places in our mouths." □

OBITUARY

Artist Aba Bayefsky dies at 78; painted horrors of Bergen-Belsen

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Aba Bayefsky, the distinguished Canadian artist whose Holocaust paintings are displayed at the Canadian War Museum, died Saturday in Toronto at the age of 78.

After Bergen-Belsen was liberated in May 1945, Bayefsky — a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force and an official Canadian war artist — witnessed firsthand some of the horrors that had been perpetrated upon the Jewish people.

He later produced dozens of haunting and grisly canvases related to what he saw at the concentration camp.

"I saw pits with thousands of dead bodies piled in them," he recalled in 1998. "They were just lumps, that's all. They had trucks backing up to these pits and they were just throwing them in. It had a profound impact on me."

"My impressions of Belsen have never gone away. They're with me today, and I see them even more clearly as I grow older. It was a major experience of my life."

Bayefsky often utilized biblical and talmudic themes in his work and published a portfolio of paintings titled "Tales From The Talmud."

He made thousands of sketches and paintings of Kensington Market, the colorful neighborhood in downtown Toronto that was once predominantly Jewish, and painted scenes of Jerusalem and other locales in Israel.

Bayefsky also explored the legends, mythologies and tales of Indian, Japanese and other cultures in his work, which has been exhibited in New York, Chicago, London, Tokyo and India. He is survived by his wife, three children and five grandchildren. □