



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel retaliates with rockets

Israel fired rockets at Palestinian security targets in Gaza City.

Thursday's attack came one day after the badly bludgeoned bodies of two Israeli teen-agers were found in a West Bank cave.

It also came hours after a roadside bomb killed two Romanian workers repairing Israel's border fence with the Gaza Strip and wounded a third.

The Romanians caught in the blast were part of a large community of foreign workers brought in by Israel to replace tens of thousands of Palestinian laborers banned from entering the Jewish state.

Pittsburgh jury: Shooter guilty

A jury found a Pittsburgh man guilty of murder and hate crimes, rejecting arguments that he was too delusional to know what he was doing when he killed five people and paralyzed another in a 90-minute shooting spree.

In April 2000, Richard Scott Baumhammers shot his Jewish neighbor, two men from India, two Asian men and a black man as he drove through the suburbs of the Steel City, stopping twice to vandalize synagogues.

Jurors were slated to hear from relatives of the victims Thursday before considering whether the unemployed immigration attorney should spend the rest of his life in prison or be sentenced to death.

Judge paves way for slave fund

A U.S. judge dismissed class-action lawsuits that had been blocking payments from a \$5.2 billion fund that Germany created to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers.

Thursday's decision by Judge Shirley Wohl Kram prompted German officials to say payments to aging survivors could begin soon.

Israeli Embassy opens in Berlin

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres offered a prayer for peace in the Middle East and for the victims of the Holocaust during a ceremony marking the opening of the new Israeli Embassy in Berlin.

Peres, on a tour of Europe to drum up support for the Jewish state, called the embassy "not only a House of Israel, but also a house representing all those driven out of their homes" by the Nazis. [Page 4]

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Resisting potholes and crime, two Jews remain in Zambian town

By Matthew Gutman

LUANSHYA, Zambia (JTA) — Dragging himself into the H. Figov Store on two sticks that serve as crutches, Muli Mulenga, wearing a threadbare Mickey-Mouse T-shirt and torn pants, desperately hopes for a pair of metal crutches.

Owner Dennis Figov, dressed in his trademark safari suit, ducks into his storeroom and emerges seconds later with two used but sturdy crutches, which he gives to the paraplegic for free.

Incidents like this have helped make the Figovs legendary in Luanshya, one of the most depressed mining towns in Zambia, located some 20 miles from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire.

However, the Figovs' prominence in Luanshya — a place that time and modern technology seem to have forgotten — is cemented by another fact of paramount importance to Zambia's devout Christians: Maureen and Dennis Figov are the last Jews left in Zambia's Copperbelt, a region that in the 1960s boasted some 300 Jewish families.

The predominately Christian community is peculiarly attached to Luanshya's two Jews, whom they consider a "blessed people" both because they are pillars of the community and for their "biblical background."

The Rev. Moses Tembo, who led the drive to name the town's central avenue after Figov, calls the Jews "the promised people."

"You see," Tembo says, "Jewish skin is not white, it is an exception. This belief is ingrained in the minds of many Zambians."

Tembo recalls the day that a friend visiting from the nearby city of Ndola drove into Luanshya just to shake Figov's hand and bless him — "because the Bible says, 'If you bless a Jew, you will also be blessed,' " Tembo says.

Figov's home and his consignment store off of Denis Figov Avenue are repositories of the region's history. In operation continuously since Figov's father opened for business in 1936, the store contains beautifully maintained Singer sewing machines, ancient watches, and new and old furniture.

In Figov's home, old photographs of his pioneering family, his badge from his stint as Luanshya mayor, community service awards from former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda — and even roadside mileage markers — reflect the past 80 years of the region's history.

A sprightly and energetic 68, Figov is one of the oldest people in Luanshya — many Zambians do not live past 40 because of disease — and the younger generation respects him as an elder. Even his fellow board members on the Ndola Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee seek Figov's advice on matters of historical precedence. Men, women and children crippled by various tropical diseases that flourish in the region's humidity crawl into Figov's store, asking for crutches, financial advice and food.

Figov rarely sends them away empty-handed. Countless nongovernmental organizations operate in the Copperbelt, but the Figovs still dole out crutches, wheelchairs and food for free. Still, the Figovs' life is not easy.

Heavy rains and a lack of maintenance have destroyed Luanshya's roads. Thieves often steal the telephone wires — melting them down for copper — and there are constant blackouts. Beggars line the town's streets and small-time entrepreneurs hawk cheap wares to passersby. And Luanshya offers no nightlife for its 250,000 residents —

MIDEAST FOCUS

Extra settlement money denied

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office denied Thursday it was allocating an additional \$360 million to shore up security at Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The U.S. State Department blasted Israel earlier this week after the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported the planned allocation. Israel's Army Radio reported Thursday that Israel has slashed its five-year funding plan for Jewish settlements from \$375 million to \$150 million in response to U.S. pressure.

Battle rages near Egyptian border

Israeli troops fought a three-hour battle with Palestinian gunmen near the town of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

A Palestinian security official said that before the battle, Israeli bulldozers destroyed at least five houses and two Palestinian police posts in the nearby Yebna refugee camp. The Israeli army said it demolished the buildings because they were used by Palestinians to attack troops patrolling the Egyptian border.

Canada official: Stop settlements

Canada's foreign minister delighted his Palestinian hosts by reiterating Canada's opposition to Jewish settlements in the territories, which he described as "obstacles" to peace.

John Manley made no condemnation of Palestinian violence and terrorism against Israelis. He met Wednesday with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during a visit to the Gaza Strip that was the second stop of a tour that also includes visits to Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

Report: Citibank eyeing Leumi

A leading U.S. bank is interested in acquiring a controlling stake in Bank Leumi, Israel's second largest lending institution, according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

— no movie theaters, playhouses or restaurants — and the books were stolen from the town library long ago.

The only forms of entertainment left are shabeens, or unofficial beer stalls — which contribute to the staggering incidence of alcoholism — and sex, which is cheap, readily available and often unprotected, worsening Zambia's AIDS epidemic.

The dire poverty drives rampant crime. Still, the crime is rarely vicious, according to the Figovs, who like most Luanshya residents with any money have been robbed.

Two years ago, burglars broke into the Figovs' house and demanded dollars, shattering Figov's ribs and wrist with a crowbar in the process.

"In South Africa," Figov says nonchalantly, "they would have killed me. Here, luckily, due to the deep Christian influence, the mentality is largely different. They steal but don't kill."

The face of Luanshya has changed drastically since the 1960s, when Figov served four years as mayor and the city was orderly and bustling.

The copper mine, the town's principal employer, boasted one of the best hospitals in Africa. Now the hospital stocks less than 5 percent of the medicines it needs, and has no doctors.

The mine also kept countless merchants and traders in business. Today the vast majority of these businesses are crumbling skeletons of buildings, whose owners have long since emigrated.

AIDS, malnourishment, tuberculosis and a lack of medical support have taken a toll on those living on Luanshya's mud-covered streets, as they have on many of Zambia's 11 million people.

The Jews' history in the Copperbelt is a story of slow and steady rise, then a quick decline. Jews who had emigrated from Latvia to Cape Town and become incorporated into the British Commonwealth first began moving into the Copperbelt in the 1920s.

Some were pioneers who left South Africa to chase adventure and riches on the frontier, while others simply followed the expansion of British influence, earning their living as butchers, merchants or sellers of packaged goods. At its height, the community supported a synagogue, whose prosperity was directly linked to the mine's.

Problems for the community began after Zambia became independent from Britain in 1964. Kaunda, the new president, declared that only native Zambians could acquire work permits, forbidding foreigners to work in positions that Zambians could fill.

With memories of the Holocaust fresh in their minds, many Jews were reluctant to exchange the protection of their British passports for Zambian ones.

"Others, who were emigrants from apartheid South Africa, could simply not tolerate living under and paying taxes to a black-dominated government," Figov says.

Most industries were nationalized in the 1960s, and the few Jews who stayed were soon driven out by nepotism, corruption and plummeting copper prices.

As the economy declined, Zambians who could not afford to flee or bribe officials suffered through food shortages and starvation. Figov's wife Maureen, 64, recalls lining up at 2 a.m. to purchase necessities such as soap, toilet paper, bread, butter and sugar.

Another peril came from the northeast, as unpaid Zairean soldiers crossed into Zambia, hijacking cars, robbing stores and pillaging towns.

Crime, poverty and hardship continue to take a toll.

Nevertheless, each day Maureen Figov takes her car and braves the spine-cracking potholes to the Da Gama School for the Crippled and the Rotary International School for the Disadvantaged, which she and Dennis support with funds, food and school materials.

Nevertheless, the most difficult part of living in Luanshya is the boredom and isolation, the Figovs say. The international community of engineers, doctors and professionals has moved away, leaving mainly poor farmers.

Even the Figovs' two sons, who went to England for university, married British women and never returned.

To shop for food, the Figovs make the arduous journey an hour each way to the slightly less-depressed town of Ndola, rarely finding all the basic products they want.

"Peas, I just want a packet of peas," a frustrated Maureen Figov says.

Figov says he and his wife would move to their apartment in Cape Town, South Africa, if he could find a buyer for his store.

Yet, he says privately, "Zambia is my home. I have been here since I was two weeks old, and I love it here." □



Daily News Bulletin

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JEWISH WORLD

Shoah denier denied platform

A student group at Oxford has canceled a debate on freedom of speech that was to feature Holocaust denier David Irving.

The Oxford Union debating society decided to call off Thursday's event at the last minute after intense pressure from a range of groups including the Union of Jewish Students, the Association of University Teachers and Oxford's own Student Union.

Arabs slam Canadian politician

Canadian Arab groups are considering legal action against the leader of the nation's opposition party, who criticized the Palestinians in a keynote speech to the Canadian Jewish Congress in Toronto earlier this week.

In the speech, Stockwell Day accused the Palestinian Authority of being involved in terror attacks against "innocent" Israeli citizens.

Auschwitz cemetery vandalized

Vandals toppled 39 gravestones at the Auschwitz cemetery, including the stone of the last Jewish resident of the Polish town, Szymon Kluger, who died last year. Several stones reportedly were destroyed, and the cemetery's walls were defaced with anti-Semitic slogans, swastikas and an image of a gallows with a Star of David hanging from it.

Canadian legislator apologizes

A Canadian legislator apologized in the House of Commons for remarks he made comparing the Canadian government to Nazi Germany because it is considering deporting former Nazi guard Helmut Oberlander without allowing him the right of appeal.

Edgar Bronfman, the Canadian-born president of the World Jewish Congress, had called legislator Andrew Telegdi's comparison "beneath contempt."

New programs for German rabbis

The College for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, Germany, plans to start a multid denominational rabbinical studies program in the fall. Another previously announced rabbinical training program, under the auspices of the liberal Abraham Geiger College in Potsdam, is also planned for the fall.

Both are a response to the growing need for rabbis and Judaism teachers in Germany.

Czech scrolls celebrated

A recent Chicago conference focused on 1,564 Czech Torah scrolls that were rescued nearly 40 years ago from an abandoned synagogue in Prague.

All but 100 or so of the 1,564 scrolls originally brought to England have been distributed across the world.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

West Bank murder reverberates among family and friends in U.S.

By Matthew E. Berger

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (JTA) — The Jewish community at the University of Maryland is mourning the West Bank murder of a son of a former Hillel rabbi at the school.

The mutilated bodies of Ya'akov Mandell, 13, and Yosef Ishran, 14, were found dead Wednesday in a cave near the West Bank settlement of Tekoa. The two were killed with stones and knives, prompting Israeli investigators to believe the murderers were Palestinians who encountered the youths in the area and spontaneously decided to kill them.

The slaying of Ya'akov, who holds dual Israeli and American citizenship, is prompting U.S. Jewish groups to pressure the Bush administration to offer rewards for the killers' arrests.

Ya'akov's father, Rabbi Seth Mandell, moved to Israel with his family in 1996 after serving the Maryland Hillel for five years.

His wife, Sherri, a freelance writer, had written for the Washington Jewish Week.

Once in Israel, the rabbi worked in Jerusalem for Ohr Somayach, a yeshiva for English speakers.

Koby, as Ya'akov was known, was the eldest of four children.

According to media reports, he and Yosef skipped school Tuesday to go hiking in the West Bank. Their parents believed they were attending a rally in Jerusalem. They notified the police when the boys did not return after midnight.

In New York, Nancy Lederman, Koby's maternal aunt, said at a news conference that the child's death was a "personal tragedy."

"It's a loss so enormous, I can't begin to describe it," she said, displaying a photo of her nephew taken a couple of years ago atop the Empire State Building.

"As you can see," Lederman said, "he was bright, beautiful and full of joy."

Lederman, who resides in Manhattan, said Koby e-mailed her regularly from Israel; she in turn sent him hundreds of books.

"He was a voracious reader," she said.

Lederman said she would soon be on her way to Israel to join the bereaved family, adding that she had already spoken twice with her sister — Koby's mother — but the conversations were brief.

Linda Zurndorfer, a family friend in Silver Spring, Md., said her son had received an e-mail from Koby a few weeks ago in which he talked about his plans for the summer and high school. When the family left for Israel in 1996, 9-year-old Koby "took it as an adventure," she said.

"He was just a regular kid," said Zurndorfer, whose children attended the Hebrew Day School of Montgomery County with the Mandell children.

Hillel officials in the Washington area remembered family members from when they lived in Maryland.

Roz Kram, who operates the food program at the Hillel, said the family used to spend Shabbat together at the Hillel.

Koby "was an inquisitive little boy who enjoyed playing and doing his own thing," Kram said. "He was a member of the Hillel family while he was here."

The University of Maryland is planning to hold a memorial for Koby.

In the wake of Koby's murder, the Zionist Organization of America and other Jewish groups plan to redouble efforts to get the U.S. State Department to reverse its current policy and offer rewards for information about U.S. citizens killed by Palestinians.

While the government offers rewards for Americans killed abroad, it exempts Palestinians, saying a reward program would be "detrimental" to efforts to capture terrorists. "More can be done," Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) said Wednesday. "We really are in the position to extradite Palestinian terrorists who murder U.S. citizens."

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said it was too early to determine whether a reward would be offered for Koby's killer. □

(JTA Staff Writer Michael J. Jordan in New York contributed to this report.)

FOCUS ON ISSUES

B'nai B'rith Youth may leave nest in its quest for independence, cash

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — One of North America's largest Jewish youth groups will strike out on its own if a resolution in its parent organization passes next week.

Under the proposed plan, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, a nondenominational group with an estimated 20,000 members in North America, would become a separate nonprofit entity and not just a department of B'nai B'rith International.

While it was previously known that B'nai B'rith was likely to cut funding for BBYO, the idea of the youth group becoming an independent organization only recently became an official proposal.

Like Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and the Anti-Defamation League — other programs that were created by B'nai B'rith that became independent — BBYO would maintain a relationship with B'nai B'rith, but would have its own board, budget and fund-raising apparatus.

The move to be voted on May 18, which has the backing of B'nai B'rith's president, executive committee and youth commission, is expected to help the youth group raise money.

And money is badly needed as BBYO's financially struggling parent, B'nai B'rith, has steadily cut allocations to it in recent years.

In fact, BBYO's 39 regions recently learned that due to B'nai B'rith's financial woes, as of July 1 they were likely to lose all their funding — approximately \$2 million — from the parent organization.

The regions vary considerably in their dependence on B'nai B'rith.

Some, like Chicago and Long Island, receive the vast majority of their operating budgets from the national group, whereas others — such as those in Denver and Detroit — already get substantial support from other sources, like local Jewish federations.

An independent BBYO is expected to be more attractive to major donors and foundations, many of whom were reportedly alienated by the fact that currently all gifts to BBYO have to be channeled through B'nai B'rith.

An international fraternal organization, B'nai B'rith has seen its North American membership rolls plummet in recent years, and many believe it lacks a clear mission or purpose.

According to several insiders, recent fund-raising efforts for BBYO were stymied, because B'nai B'rith would not guarantee donors that gifts to BBYO would be solely for the youth group and not result in B'nai B'rith siphoning off some of the donation.

Donors also feared that B'nai B'rith would simply use the gift as a pretext to decrease the funds B'nai B'rith gave BBYO, these sources said.

Promoting independence for BBYO signifies an abrupt shift for B'nai B'rith's international president, Richard Heideman, who last summer told JTA the youth group would not "become a separate agency as long as I'm president."

Heideman and other top B'nai B'rith officials declined to be interviewed about the proposal, saying they preferred to wait and see if it passes at the May board of governors meeting.

However, many B'nai B'rith leaders and adult leaders of BBYO said they like the idea of separating.

"It's generally a positive thing," said Bruce Plotkin, chair of

BBYO's Rocky Mountain Region adult advisory board, in Denver.

Jay Swidler, adult board chair of BBYO's Chicago-area region, said an independent BBYO would mean "less bureaucracy."

"I'd like to have B'nai B'rith International's fingers and hands off the organization if we're going to try to move it forward," Swidler said.

But one BBYO director is worried that "money always comes with strings attached."

"The agency's not prepared to sell its soul to survive," said this official, who preferred to remain anonymous. "We want it to stay the way it is — youth-led, with the kids involved in decision-making."

Under the plan, B'nai B'rith leaders would have a place on BBYO's board, along with other donors and supporting organizations and the group's teen leadership.

While few B'nai B'rith leaders appear to oppose the plan outright, some are saddened and fear it signals B'nai B'rith's demise.

Daniel Frank, a B'nai B'rith board member from Minnetonka, Minn., who unsuccessfully challenged Heideman in an election last summer, said spinning off BBYO is "probably unfortunately the way that things have to go."

Others were guardedly optimistic about B'nai B'rith's future.

Joe Morris, president of B'nai B'rith's Midwest region, said the parent organization has a future — if it redefines its mission and finds a new niche.

He suggested that the organization step up its advocacy for Jews overseas, expand its small Washington museum into a world-class Jewish museum and become an advocate for Jewish day schools. "I have a long view — if we're doing needed things and doing them well there are young people who will join in," Morris said. □

Sharpshooters keep watchful eye as Israeli Embassy opens in Berlin

JTA Staff Report

BERLIN (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres offered a prayer for peace in the Middle East and for the victims of the Holocaust during a ceremony this week marking the opening of the new Israeli Embassy here.

With some 2,000 people attending Wednesday's ceremony, Peres called the embassy "not only a House of Israel, but also a house representing all those driven out of their homes" by the Nazis.

Speakers at the ceremony included Israel's first ambassador in Berlin, Shimon Stein; Germany's foreign minister, Joschka Fischer; and Berlin Mayor Eberhard Diepgen.

The festivities took place under the watchful gaze of several masked, black-clad sharpshooters poised on the embassy roof.

The new structure is faced with Jerusalem stone and consists of six segments, meant as a reminder of the 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

It was built on land purchased in 1928 by a Jewish businessman, Hermann Schondorf, who was forced to emigrate in 1934, a year after the Nazis came to power.

The building was designed by Israeli architect Orit Willenberg-Giladi and built by Hochtief, Germany's second largest construction firm.

The company also built Hitler's Berlin bunker. □