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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Pope honors Babi Yar victims

Pope John Paul paid tribute to the thousands of Ukrainian Jews killed by the Nazis in one of the worst massacres of the Holocaust.

On the third day of his visit to Ukraine, the pope offered silent prayers Monday beside the ravine at Babi Yar.

The chief rabbi of Ukraine, Ya'akov Bleich, accompanied the pope to the site where Nazi troops slaughtered more than 30,000 Jews in September 1941.

Bleich also urged the pope to open Vatican archives so that children who were born Jewish but were saved and raised by Catholics during World War II could learn about their origins.

Peres: No quick fix for ambushes

There is no "immediate solution" to the spate of Palestinian ambushes of Israeli settlers on West Bank roads, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Monday.

"With all due respect, they have to be realistic," Peres said of the settlers.

His comments came the same day that settler leaders announced that armed settlers have begun conducting patrols and escorts along key roads connecting West Bank settlements with Jerusalem.

Two Israeli women were lightly wounded in a shooting attack on an Egged bus on a road south of Jerusalem.

Israeli officials said there would have been more casualties from Monday's attack had the bus not been bulletproof.

The Israel Defense Force has recently provided bulletproof buses and flak jackets for civilian use in the West Bank.

Twenty-eight Israeli settlers have been killed since the start of the Palestinian uprising, most of them ambushed on West Bank roads.

Report: Arafat lauds bomber

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat praised the suicide bomber who killed 21 Israelis in the June 1 attack outside a Tel Aviv disco, according to the Jerusalem Post.

The bomber was a "wonderful example of a hero," Arafat said in a letter displayed on a German television show.

Arafat's office called the letter "a clear forgery."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

As uneasy 'cease-fire' descends, the battle still rages in cyberspace

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The intifada may have cooled somewhat since the recent Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire, but Palestinian activists are struggling as hard as ever to make political gains on the Internet.

That's where Arjan Fassed and three of his friends have joined forces to create the Electronic Intifada Web site — www.electronicintifada.net — with the goal of showing that Israel is violating "international law and international human rights."

"We are not a part of the intifada," Fassed told JTA. "Intifada means 'shaking off' in Arabic. We are simply trying to shake off some of the anti-Palestinian bias in the world media."

Fassed may not be firing machine guns or throwing stones, but his computer is on the new front line of the century-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are no bullets, no explosives and no noise, but the Internet has become an extension of the war of attrition between Israel and the Palestinians.

Hackers regularly sabotage enemy Web sites.

Massive e-mail campaigns urge friends and contacts to send petitions, contact government officials or complain to media outlets. Mobilizing thousands of people to vote for or against politicized photographs as Picture of the Year seems as important as any military gain on the battlefield.

Uri Noy, director of the information and Internet division at Israel's Foreign Ministry, told JTA that there are scores of sites like Electronic Intifada, all focused on blackening Israel's name around the world.

"The propaganda war is everywhere, but in the Internet it is so much easier to wage," Noy said. "One can build a Web site in a matter of minutes. You don't need to identify yourself, you carry no responsibility and it involves a small expense."

Facing that front is no different than facing other hostile media, Noy said. It demands a continuous effort — often Sisyphean, sometimes rewarding.

Six months ago, Israeli scientists met at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba for a special seminar on cyber-terrorism.

Cyber-terrorism, organizers said, is no longer the domain of teen-aged hackers whose crowning achievement is denying someone access to a particular server.

"It's a phenomenon that can affect the course of a conflict and the minds of the public," said Prof. Dov Shinar, head of the university's Hubert Burda Center for Innovative Communication, which organized the seminar.

Hackers regularly target the Web site of Israel's Foreign Ministry, www.mfa.gov.il, even paralyzing it for a few days last October. Since then, however, the cyber-terrorists have been less successful.

"We have matured since," Noy told JTA.

True, Web sites like Electronic Intifada are not cyber-terrorism; cyber-propaganda is a more appropriate term. They may contribute to a better understanding of the Palestinian cause — though their material is too biased to be of much use to mainstream publications — but they are unlikely to contribute to better understanding between Palestinians and Israelis.

Fassed is Electronic Intifada's equivalent of a military correspondent. This month he reported from his residence at Dahiyat al-Barid, a Palestinian suburb in north Jerusalem.

"The term 'cease-fire' at this stage is far removed from the reality of a war being

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel issues Bin Laden warning

Israel's defense minister warned Jewish community leaders that Saudi terrorist leader Osama bin Laden is seeking to recruit local operatives to attack Israeli targets.

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer told a meeting Monday in Jerusalem of the Jewish Agency for Israel that bin Laden is "trying very hard to penetrate into the country through local people" and that he wants "to establish an infrastructure here in this country."

The warning followed a report on an Arabic satellite television channel that bin Laden's followers are planning a major attack on U.S. and Israeli interests in the next two weeks.

Israel nabs lynching suspects

Israel arrested two more Palestinians it said were involved in the brutal lynching of two Israeli soldiers by a Palestinian mob in October.

One of the suspects was a 20-year-old Palestinian who appeared in media photographs raising his blood-soaked hands. In recent months, Israel has arrested a number of Palestinians suspected of participation in the lynching.

Palestinians fire on Hebron Jews

Five Israelis, one of them a 7-year-old boy, were wounded Monday when Palestinians fired on a Jewish neighborhood of Hebron, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*. Palestinian gunmen opened fire from a Palestinian neighborhood overlooking Hebron.

Winds blow ill, well for paraglider

Despite the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence, an Israeli paraglider received a warm welcome when winds blew him off course and deposited him in a Palestinian village near the West Bank city of Jenin.

Local residents offered him coffee and cake before Palestinian officials arrived and transferred him to Israeli officials in the area, according to Army Radio.

waged by a sophisticated, well-financed and well-equipped (with U.S.-made weapons) Israeli army against a largely impoverished Palestinian civilian population," his report read. Unlike other battlefield correspondents whose profession demands objectivity, Fassed's reports clearly take the side of "his" army.

Not a word of criticism is offered about Palestinian terrorist attacks against civilians inside Israel proper. He expends no keystrokes to describe the almost daily shooting attacks against Israelis or the murder of settlers — as if Palestinian violence is somehow legitimate.

"There are two sides to every story," Electronic Intifada proclaims, going on to challenge each of the Israeli Foreign Ministry's answers to 16 Frequently Asked Questions.

Like other Palestinian sites, Electronic Intifada is rich with quotes of international resolutions and conventions — carefully culled to bolster the Palestinians' self-image as victims of a historic injustice not at all of their own making. Although the Web writers claim total objectivity — "all our information is well-sourced," they proclaim — only information that shows Israel as wrong and the Palestinians as right is used.

Electronic Intifada was founded last October by four activists associated with Bir Zeit University, the hotbed of Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank. The key figure was Nigel Parry, a Scottish citizen who worked as Bir Zeit's webmaster and previously built other anti-Israel Web sites.

One debuted in September 1996, after Israel opened a new exit to an archaeological tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem. Seizing on the development, the Palestinian Authority claimed Israel was seeking to collapse the Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount, sparking days of gunfights in which 15 Israelis and 61 Palestinians were killed.

For Parry, the violence was an opportunity to launch "the first-ever Web site in which local residents of an active war zone" told their stories, providing daily reports during the violence.

Fassed and his friends are convinced that the world media is biased toward Israel, and it is their mission to put things in order.

"The Electronic Intifada Web site aims to enable a growing, worldwide network of human rights and media activists to challenge myth, spin, and distortion about Palestinians and Palestinian rights disseminated by Israel's official spokespersons and allied pro-Israeli organizations in North America and Europe" a press release on the site says.

To make that point, however, Electronic Intifada staff must ignore what many see as the "good" press the Palestinians enjoyed until this month, when a suicide bomber killed 21 Israeli youths outside a Tel Aviv disco and Israel chose not to respond — temporarily tipping the scales in the battle for world opinion.

The Palestinian activists point to the favorable press Israel received after last summer's Camp David summit and subsequent negotiations.

They appear unable to understand why then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak emerged from the negotiations as the "good guy," while the Palestinians — who rejected Barak's offer to dismantle most Israeli settlements and end the Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip — still see themselves as an occupied people.

To prove their point that "there are two sides to every story," the Electronic Intifada cites the recent killing of five Palestinian policemen near Ramallah, in what the Israeli army ultimately admitted was a case of mistaken identity.

"The media waited for five days with its reports until the Israelis admitted that the policemen were killed by mistake," Fassed claimed — though in fact the killings were reported immediately around the world. "It is not a war between two equal partners."

Perhaps the only common ground between Fassed and Noy is the belief that "there are two sides to every story." There are also cases in which journalists make mistakes that could hurt the public image of either side in the conflict.

As an example, Noy cites a photograph that ran in *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe* and other papers shortly after Palestinian violence began last September. According to the caption, the photo showed a Palestinian youth bludgeoned by an Israeli policeman, who was rushing again toward the bleeding young man with his baton raised.

While the photograph was shocking, it depicted something far different from that indicated by the original caption. What it really showed was a Jewish yeshiva student from Chicago who had been beaten up by Palestinians and was being rescued by the policeman. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Mayors back faith-based plan

The U.S. Conference of Mayors gave its backing to President Bush's faith-based initiative, which would give religious groups an increased role in providing social services.

Addressing the criticism that the initiative will erode church-state separation, Bush told the conference on Monday that the proposed federal funding to charities and religious organizations will be spent on social services, not worship services.

Recognizing that "there must be secular alternatives for those who wish to use the services," Bush nonetheless added, "The days of discriminating against religious institutions simply because they are religious must come to an end if we want to heal America."

Slave labor lawyers pressed

The leader of Germany's Jewish community called on lawyers to forgo part of their payment for handling Nazi-era slave labor cases.

Paul Spiegel urged the lawyers on Sunday to give up some of the estimated \$51 million due them, as a gesture of respect for the former slave laborers.

"Earning money should not come before moralistic intentions," Spiegel said.

In another development, the Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli officials are criticizing Spiegel for saying that some 30,000 people who entered Germany as Jews in the past several years were not Jews according to Jewish religious law.

"It's strange that the leader of German Jewry is advising the German government on who is a Jew," said Israel's deputy absorption minister, Yuli Edelstein, himself an immigrant from the Soviet Union.

Britain asked to deport ex-Nazis

The Simon Wiesenthal Center urged the new British home secretary, David Blunkett, to modify British policy so that Nazi war criminals can be stripped of their citizenship and deported.

The center said the change of policy was needed to stop "Great Britain from continuing to afford a haven for some of the worst of Hitler's henchmen."

Muslims protest Shakespeare

Two scenes in a Canadian production of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" were changed after a Muslim lobbying group protested.

The changes were made to appease the Canadian division of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which said the production's portrayal of the Prince of Morocco, a minor character, was offensive to Muslims.

The play is one of Shakespeare's most controversial because of its anti-Semitic portrayal of Shylock, a central character.

Israel, P.A. must sacrifice a lot, say authors of report on Middle East

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The situation in the Middle East is grave, and both Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to make enormous sacrifices, say the authors of a U.S. plan for resuscitating the Middle East peace process.

While sticking strictly to the framework they have outlined before, former Sens. George Mitchell (D-Maine) and Warren Rudman (R-N.H.) offered some additional insight Monday at the National Press Club on what Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States should do to advance the process.

Rudman suggested that Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are flash points for violence and that a settlement freeze could ease tensions. Such a freeze was one of the controversial recommendations of the international commission that Rudman served on and Mitchell chaired.

"If you really want to de-escalate the violence, just" start "taking away some of the causes of violence," Rudman said. "I am not saying do away with them, but we are saying, for goodness sake, show some good faith and freeze them for now."

Mitchell said it would be beneficial for President Bush to invite Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to the White House, but said it would be presumptuous to suggest when that should happen. He said he believes the White House intends to invite Arafat eventually, when it believes the time is right.

Mitchell also said U.S. lawmakers should "back off" and not try to enact legislation that punishes the Palestinian Authority for violating its peace commitments. Such tactics — which include adding the Palestinian Authority to the State Department's list of terrorist groups and withholding funds from the Palestinians — could hurt the White House's mediation efforts, he said.

Mitchell was the only advertised speaker for the event, but it was Rudman, a guest of the former majority leader, who offered a franker view of the situation and the obstacles to resolving the ongoing crisis between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

"The leaders of these two groups are going to have an enormously difficult time politically in doing what has to be done," Rudman said. "Arafat has factions within his organization that absolutely do not want peace, and the Israelis have a coalition government that could fracture so easily if the leadership in that government attempted to do something that a certain group opposed."

Noting the large number of disgruntled young men in Arafat's military, Rudman described the situation as "literally a ticking time bomb." Rudman also expressed concern about the increased role the European Union and United Nations are playing in the region, saying diplomatic mediation should be left to Secretary of State Colin Powell and William Burns, the assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs.

"I think that too many cooks tends to spoil the broth," he said. "And if the United States has a good, strong effort in the person of Secretary Powell, Ambassador Burns and, who knows, some day possibly the president himself, I think that that ought to be followed."

He also gave a passionate response on the issue of Israel's allegedly excessive use of force.

"It's very hard to pass judgment on either side as to excessive force," he said. "When you see your children or your grandchildren lying dead outside a shopping center, when you see your husband or your brother and your mother being buried — and I apply this equally to Israelis and Palestinians — it is hard for a third party to dispassionately state whether that was an excessive amount."

Both men declined to delve into the final status issues dividing Israel and the Palestinian Authority, saying it was not part of the commission's mandate.

President Clinton appointed Mitchell and Rudman as part of a five-man team to evaluate the causes of violence in the region after the Sharm el-Sheik summit last October — on the understanding that the violence, which began in late September and is now in its ninth month, would have ended long before the commission began its work.

The commission, which issued its report in May, included former Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland and Javier Solana, the E.U.'s chief foreign policy official. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Chicago federation takes lead in fund-raising for gay activities

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Like most single men, Bruce Lederman gets a lot of matchmaking offers from people he meets in the Jewish community. When told, "I have a great sister," Lederman, 38, usually responds, "That's nice to think of me. But I'm gay. Do you have a brother?"

Lederman, who is on the board of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and serves on the young leadership division of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization for North American Jewish federations, says his homosexuality has not been a problem in either organization.

And he sees nothing controversial in his latest effort to combine two aspects of his identity: helping to create North America's first federation endowment for gay and lesbian initiatives. "I think it's as mainstream as hamantaschen," he said. "It's about Jews helping Jews."

Although some in the Orthodox community are less than pleased with the Chicago federation's Jewish Lesbian and Gay Fund, it passed unanimously through the federation's board — which has a reputation as conservative and risk-averse — and has generated little controversy. The new fund comes as lesbians and gays in large cities are gradually gaining acceptance, and even being courted by, the mainstream Jewish community.

In the past few years:

- The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia hired Harold Goldman as its executive vice president, making him the first openly gay person to hold such a high position in the federation world.

- A number of Jewish federations — including those in Los Angeles and San Francisco — have sponsored gay and lesbian missions to Israel.

- San Francisco's federation has a task force for gay and lesbian issues, and several federations — including those in Boston, Philadelphia and Albany — have sponsored programs to sensitize the agencies they fund to gay and lesbian concerns.

- The Jewish National Fund, which until 1992 refused to post a plaque for a forest dedicated by the Fourth International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews, also recently sponsored a gay and lesbian mission.

- The Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis affirmed its rabbis' rights to officiate at same-sex commitment ceremonies. While such ceremonies are not endorsed by the Conservative movement, several rabbis officiate at them without facing disciplinary measures.

- The UJC and the New York federation both offer benefits to partners of gay and lesbian employees.

Modeled on the growing phenomenon of women's foundations in federations, Chicago's Jewish Lesbian and Gay Fund will solicit contributions separately from the federation's regular campaign in an effort both to attract gay and lesbian donors and to step up services for this constituency.

Starting next year, it will allocate money for such things as educating the Jewish community about lesbian and gay concerns, providing services for lesbian and gay Jews and mobilizing Jewish support for anti-homophobia initiatives.

Since an article on the fund appeared on the front page of the Chicago Sun-Times last week, federation officials say they have received a handful of complaints, but considerably more calls supporting the fund.

"There hasn't been an uproar," said Steven Nasatir, president of the Chicago federation. "Are there some who have questioned it? The answer is, Yeah, we've received a couple of expressions of negative approval from some, and I think that many are satisfied when they learn that this is a separate program which the federation is pleased to develop and support, but not support with dollars from the annual campaign."

Objections have come primarily from traditional and Orthodox Jews who believe that homosexual behavior violates Jewish law and should not be encouraged.

Rabbi Joseph Ozarowski, executive director of the Chicago Rabbinical Council, an umbrella organization of Orthodox rabbis, said the Orthodox community does not support the fund.

However, "the fact is, people who have different sexual orientations are still part of the Jewish community and are still entitled to what everyone else is entitled to," he said.

Were the fund part of the annual campaign, though, there might be more of a "question of whether we need to be fostering a specific lifestyle that really contradicts what the Torah says," Ozarowski said.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, spokesman for the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, based in New York, was more critical.

"Earmarking funds for activities or projects" aimed at the "gay community is as outrageous as it would be to earmark funds for projects in the wife-swapping community," he said.

The fact that there has been little objection to the Chicago fund, Shafran said, simply indicates that "the Orthodox community in most cities has become so disillusioned with the federations that they probably just write it off as, 'People running the federations don't share our values, so what more can we expect of them?'"

In reaching out to gays and lesbians, several observers say, federations are acting in their financial self-interest.

"It doesn't take a lot of money to do the right thing," said Alvin Baum, one of three openly gay people on the San Francisco federation's board. "The issue for lesbian and gay people is being sure that they are welcome, that people are aware of their existence and the occasional special need."

In addition, said Baum, who heads the federation's gay and lesbian task force, "there's a significant amount of money in the gay and lesbian community."

One high-level Chicago federation professional, who did not want to be identified, said Nasatir has "got a nose for where the money is, and there's money in this community."

"Here's a segment of the population, they want to identify with the community, they don't want to be marginalized, so heck — it's a win-win situation," the professional said.

"The risk of really alienating the gay and lesbian community outweighs the risk of alienating people who are opposed to them."

In addition to the financial incentive, the growing acceptance reflects the fact that gays and lesbians enjoy greater acceptance in U.S. society, particularly in the affluent, highly educated, politically liberal circles that American Jews tend to frequent.

"People today acknowledge that even though they may not know a lesbian or gay person, the person sitting across from them may have a brother, sister, child or neighbor who's gay or lesbian," Lederman said. □