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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Peres, Arafat meet in Cairo

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres held unscheduled talks with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Cairo.

After meeting for more than an hour Sunday, Peres said he had told Arafat that Israel was waiting for seven days of complete calm before starting peace moves.

In another development, Israel's Cabinet agreed to build new towns in a southern part of the country it offered the Palestinians last year in exchange for land in the West Bank.

Cabinet Secretary Gideon Saar said all but one minister at Sunday's meeting supported the decision to build towns in the unpopulated Halutza Sands area of the Negev Desert near the Gaza Strip.

During talks at the Camp David summit last July, Palestinian negotiators gave no firm answer to the land-swap proposal.

Barak: Peace will take years

It "will take years" for there to be "permanent peace" between Israel and the Palestinians, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told Newsweek magazine.

In his first interview since losing the February election to Ariel Sharon, Barak said that after the failure of the Camp David talks last year, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat "decided that only by turning to violence could he once again create world sympathy" for the Palestinian cause.

FSU rights group beefs up efforts

A group that monitors human rights in the former Soviet Union is stepping up its efforts.

The Union of Councils for Jews in the FSU, formerly known as the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, is increasing the number of bureaus in Russia alone to more than 40.

The group also held a two-day seminar in Moscow last week to train 50 human rights activists from across Russia in monitoring anti-Semitism and human rights advocacy.

According to the group, an anti-Semitic leaflet is circulating in many Russian Orthodox churches.

The leaflet refers to Jews as "damn kikes" and "servants of Satan," and blames Jews for Russia's current financial and social woes.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Months of deadly violence force Israeli leftists to rethink strategies

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was a fairly restrained group of left-wing demonstrators outside the Prime Minister's residence here on a recent Thursday evening, holding up boldly printed signs and chanting slogans, with occasional supportive honks from cars driving past the busy intersection.

"Powell: Mitchell Now or Never," read the Peace Now demonstrators' signs, beseeching the U.S. secretary of state to successfully moderate negotiations during his visit.

Across the street, the tight core of right wingers parked a truck holding dummy oil barrels representing America's interest in retaining Arab oil interests. They also had signs that read, "Arafat's Ceasefire Is Killing Us," and "Arafat Must Be Defeated."

"Anger is the best trigger," said Galia Golan, the spokesperson for Peace Now, which had about 70 protesters. "The right wing has that."

The past nine months of the Al-Aksa Intifada have been a time of re-evaluation for many of Israel's peacenik groups. The more moderate groups have grown disillusioned with Palestinian violence and the physical, emotional and political toll it is wreaking on Israelis. The radicals, however, are finding it hard to restrain from saying, "I told you so," having warned for years that Israeli "occupation" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip inevitably would lead to an explosion.

"We don't feel that something unexpected happened, we warned the government about this possibility," said Adam Keller, spokesman for Gush Shalom, a peace group that identifies with the Palestinian struggle — except for the "right" of Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes in Israel.

"The Palestinians want a state with borders from pre-1967, and the Israelis were trying to swindle them out of it," Keller said.

When the intifada began at the end of last September, groups like Peace Now and their cohorts to the left were out in full force, protesting Israel's actions against its Arab citizens and Palestinian neighbors.

Peace Now participated in Arab demonstrations, while Rabbis for Human Rights, an organization dedicated to protecting Palestinian human rights, helped Arab farmers harvest what was left of their olive crops and dismantle roadblocks.

Gush Shalom turned the heat up on its boycott of Israeli goods made in the West Bank, while Women in Black, a worldwide feminist movement, continued its weekly Friday vigils attended by Jewish and Arab women.

But as Palestinian violence intensified toward suicide bombings and sniper attacks, Peace Now — which was established by army reservists frustrated by the decades-old conflict with the Palestinians — found its worldview undercut.

Peace Now rejects violence — as do most of the peace organizations — and found itself stunned by the Palestinian outburst.

Thousands of supporters abandoned the peace camp after concluding that the Palestinians weren't serious about reconciliation with Israel, but others concluded that former Prime Minister Ehud Barak's peace offers at Camp David last summer — and in subsequent negotiations — weren't as generous as they had believed.

The recently released Mitchell Report, however, which sets out guidelines for moving away from violence and back toward diplomacy, has given Peace Now a basis to advocate a return to the negotiating table.

"The point now is to revive the peace negotiations because everything is negotia-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli forces nab Arab militant

An Israeli undercover unit abducted a senior Islamic Jihad operative from his home near Bethlehem. As he was leaving his home Sunday, Mahmoud Hamdan was forced into a waiting commercial vehicle by five Israeli soldiers dressed as street market vendors, according to a report on Israel Radio that was later confirmed by the army.

Hezbollah: We have kidnap video

Hezbollah says it has a videotape of its kidnapping last October of three Israeli soldiers. Israel has been pressing the United Nations to release an unedited version of a video made by an Indian member of a U.N. peacekeeping force 18 hours after the kidnapping. According to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, a U.N. peacekeeper testified last week that the Hezbollah kidnappers wore the uniforms of U.N. peacekeepers.

In a related development, Indian officials said Sunday they will wait for a report from their envoy in Tel Aviv before acting on allegations that Indian members of the U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon helped Hezbollah gunmen kidnap the three Israeli soldiers.

According to Israeli media reports, Indian soldiers in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon accepted bribes from Hezbollah in addition to helping with the kidnapping.

The United Nations said last Friday it would investigate allegations that U.N. forces helped in the kidnapping.

Hamas militant killed in car blast

A Hamas militant was killed in a car bombing last Friday that Palestinian officials blamed on Israel.

Israel gave no formal comment, but Israeli security sources noted that Fawwaz Badran was linked to two suicide bomb attacks in Netanya this year and had been on Israel's list of wanted terror suspects.

ble," Golan told JTA. "As much as the Israeli public is disillusioned, it still wants an agreement and it supports taking down the settlements and a two-state solution."

Peace Now hasn't had a major demonstration since the intifada began in late September. Its first demonstration in months was planned for June 2, but it was canceled after a suicide bombing the day before killed 21 Israelis outside a Tel Aviv disco.

Golan characterized the recent gathering outside the prime minister's home as a cross between a vigil and a demonstration. With the Mitchell Report and the consequent cease-fire plan mediated by CIA Director George Tenet — but never implemented — Peace Now is again concentrating on holding a full demonstration.

"In left-wing circles, you can be a small and pure movement, but there's an important place for mass movements," said Golan, who is a political science professor at Tel Aviv University.

But the days of gathering hundreds of thousands of demonstrators under Peace Now's relatively moderate banner are long over, according to Keller.

"Peace Now can't do a big demonstration in Rabin Square anymore," he said. "They've had a downturn in numbers, and they're having intensive fights over this crisis and how to deal with it."

During the winter months, when it was primarily Jewish settlers bearing the brunt of Palestinian violence, these groups had to reckon how to balance their calls for nonviolence with their opposition to Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

When violence moved inside Israel's pre-1967 borders, and bombs began exploding in Netanya, Kfar Saba and Tel Aviv, their problems intensified.

"We have to figure out how we can more clearly indicate that we reject this violence," said Jeremy Milgrom, a Conservative rabbi and a field director for Rabbis for Human Rights, a small faction among rabbis in Israel. "If we go out and protest at a roadblock, the public sees us as pro-Palestinian, which we have no problem with. But we're also seen as somehow condoning the use of violence by Palestinians, and that's not us either."

Groups like Rabbis for Human Rights lost some supporters who felt grief and anger about Palestinian violence against Jewish settlers, Milgrom said.

The issue of Palestinian human rights becomes a luxury of sorts for these groups, particularly when Jewish settlers are being targeted and killed on a regular basis.

"We have to assess how to address this predicament," Milgrom acknowledged. "We don't want an open season on settlers. We become very brittle and even unfaithful to our own sources of faith when we look at a process which forces settlers to leave by violence."

The same goes for Peace Now.

For months, the organization has been holding open meetings to discuss its direction.

For the most part, the older members want to keep things quiet, while the younger activists talk about demonstrating against Israeli policy in the territories.

A senior army officer recently lashed out at leftist groups, saying their demonstrations in the West Bank are harmful to soldiers and settlers, according to a report in the Jerusalem Post.

"The leftist demonstrations are inflaming the situation and giving a great boost to the Palestinians," the officer told the Israel Defense Force weekly Bamahane, according to the Post. "They are provoking attacks on soldiers and Israeli citizens, and the demonstrating leftists have no problem with this. They have crossed the red line."

But Peace Now insists that it does have red lines. Predominantly secular and middle class, the organization always has been careful about its bedfellows.

"We've always been Zionist and we don't go in for Israel bashing," Golan said.

As such, Peace Now has always had easy access to Knesset members and government ministers, as well as strong ties to the Labor and Meretz parties.

That contrasts with the more radical Gush Shalom, which clearly distinguishes itself from the Labor/Meretz mishpachah, or family, Keller said. For Gush Shalom, the emphasis is on ending Israel's remaining "occupation" of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and developing close associations with Palestinian organizations.

"We're not like Peace Now or Meretz, that are looking for a path out of this crisis," Keller said. "We're more hardcore. We see the intifada as the struggle of the Palestinians against the occupation, and they have the right to resist — just like the Israelis did against the British."



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JEWISH WORLD

In Idaho, home of supremacists, park will commemorate Anne Frank

By Tom Tugend

L.A. solidarity rally planned

Some 15,000 people from the Los Angeles area are expected to take part in a July 22 Israel solidarity rally. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is slated to address the crowd via phone from Israel. California Gov. Gray Davis and Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn are also expected to speak.

In a related development, some 45 Canadian Jewish leaders left Sunday on a solidarity mission to Israel arranged by B'nai Brith Canada's Institute for International Affairs.

During the five-day mission, the delegates plan to meet with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and several government ministers to discuss security, political and humanitarian issues.

Jewish Agency to sponsor hotline

Potential Jewish emigrants to Israel from across the former Soviet Union are expected to participate in an "Israel hotline" sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel. During the July 22 event, more than 1,000 people will receive answers about life in Israel via telephone, fax and the Internet.

Chabad plans West Coast centers

The Chabad-Lubavitch movement is opening seven new centers in California and Nevada.

The new centers will augment the 93 Chabad centers already operating in the region.

Taiwan party won't back off ad

Taiwan's ruling party defended a television commercial that featured footage of Hitler, saying it was not intended to hurt the feelings of Jews.

Following protests by the Anti-Defamation League, an official with the Democratic Progressive Party said last Friday it might add subtitles to "make clear Hitler was a dictator," but added that the party "will continue to air the advertisement."

The party official said the advertisement — which also featured footage of Cuban President Fidel Castro giving a speech and President Kennedy delivering his inaugural address — aims to encourage young Taiwanese to participate in politics and speak their minds.

Anti-Nazi protest turns violent

At least two people were injured and 32 arrested when a leftist protest against a neo-Nazi march became violent in the German town of Neubrandenburg on Saturday.

Leftist protesters throwing bottles, eggs and stones attacked police protecting the right-wing extremists. Police said 750 people gathered to protest the march by 300 neo-Nazis.

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Not long ago, Idaho conjured up images of white supremacists goose-stepping at their forest stronghold in this U.S. state.

In the near future, Idaho may draw more welcome attention as the home of the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial and Park in Boise, the state's capital.

The Aryan Nations has left its Hayden Lake compound, evicted after it lost a \$6.3 million lawsuit and filed for bankruptcy earlier this year.

Initial excavation on the Anne Frank project began in June, with the inauguration scheduled for spring of next year. Set within a 30,000 square-foot park donated by the city, the memorial is expected to include:

- A granite wall with waterfall, evocative of Washington's Vietnam War memorial, on whose 19 panels will be etched 60 quotes from past and present champions of human rights and victims of intolerance.

The first two quotes will be from the U.S. Declaration of independence and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The last will be from Anne's wartime diary: "If God lets me live...I shall not remain insignificant. I shall work in the world and for mankind."

- A life-sized bronze sculpture of Anne, standing on a chair and peering through an "attic" window.

- Children's Plaza, with appropriate quotes, visuals and activities.

- Granite writer's table and bronze replica of Anne's diary.

- Footbridge, benches, a flower garden and a reading knoll for active learning and quiet reflection.

- The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights engraved on a garden wall.

The project will cost between \$1.6 million and \$2 million, almost all of which has been raised through private donations, ranging from a \$500,000 matching gift to nickels and dimes collected by Idaho schoolchildren.

The memorial project is under the auspices of the Idaho Human Rights Education Center, whose executive director, Les Bock, estimates that 250,000 visitors, including 25,000 schoolchildren, will come to the park annually.

These are huge figures for a state whose population is less than 1.3 million. The Jewish community of about 1,000 makes up less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the state's total, and supports a synagogue in Boise.

The origin of the memorial park dates back to 1995, when an Anne Frank exhibit went on display in Boise. It attracted 45,000 visitors, about 5 percent of the state's population. Some of the thinking that went into the creation of the memorial project is discussed in a two-page flier.

"Why, in Idaho, do we work so passionately on this endeavor?" it asks rhetorically, and responds, "Some may say to offset the vocal hate groups who tarnish the reputation of our state; others may say to build a lasting legacy for generations to come; and still others may say it's simply the right thing to do."

But why name the memorial for Anne Frank? The response is that "Anne Frank's story teaches us about human rights in a way that everyone can understand. From her tragic experiences, we can learn how human rights issues affect us all and how to safeguard against similar human rights tragedies."

In 1944, Anne and her family were arrested by the Germans after they were betrayed to the police. She died in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. □

Jewish media firm buys Web site

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Detroit-based Jewish media company partly owned by philanthropist Michael Steinhardt has purchased the Jewish.com Web site for an undisclosed sum.

Jewish Renaissance Media, which also owns the Detroit Jewish News and Atlanta Jewish Times, is hoping to be "the pre-eminent gatherer and disseminator of information for and about the American Jewish community," according to its president, Arthur Horwitz. □

Author meant to help coexistence, but threats now leave him in hiding

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The book designed to explain the Muslim faith to Jews was published in May, the death threat came in June, and the author is now huddled out of sight in a safe house.

Jewish and Muslim groups, meanwhile, are left to ponder what can happen next to make the situation any worse. The irony of the situation is rich: A book conceived by the American Jewish Committee to advance Muslim-Jewish understanding may in fact end up exacerbating tension between the faiths.

A fatwa — or religious edict — was issued by a Muslim cleric to “shed the blood” of the author, professor Khalid Duran, but later was clarified as merely a call to investigate him.

Depending on the findings of the probe, though, Duran still could be declared fit for killing.

The AJCommittee condemned the edict by Sheikh Abd-al-Mun'im Abu Zant, a leader in the militant Islamic Action Front, an opposition party in Jordan.

“In a free society, no one should tolerate the threat to kill an author,” said David Harris, executive director of the AJCommittee, which published Duran’s book — “Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Islam for Jews” — as well as a companion volume explaining Judaism to Muslims.

“All Americans, not least Muslims, should immediately speak out against this outrage and assault on democratic society,” Harris said.

The other volume in the series, “Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims,” was written by Rabbi Reuven Firestone, a professor at Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion.

Firestone’s book has not attracted much media attention, and is considered an innocuous primer on Judaism.

But Duran has been under scrutiny from the start. A leading analyst of Islam and politics, he has written six books and has taught at Temple University and American University, but also is something of a polarizing figure in the Muslim world.

The Washington-based Council of American Islamic Relations, which has voiced support for militant groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, attacked Duran’s book even before it was published.

Arab newspapers took up the issue, denouncing Duran for supposedly spreading “anti-Muslim propaganda.”

The AJCommittee called such attacks “nothing more than incitement and character assassination.”

Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, praised Duran for being a “freethinking Muslim.”

“His is a rare and welcome voice of Muslim liberalism at a time when radicals dominate the mosques, the media and the counsels of state,” Pipes said.

Although Duran’s book was reviewed and approved by Islamic scholars before publication, and has been well received by trade publications, some have questioned his scholarship.

Hussein Ibish, communications director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, maintains that Duran is not a reputable scholar and calls his book “bizarre.”

But Ibish admits that he finds the incident troubling, and said it cannot help the already-tense relations between Jewish and Muslim groups.

“Intolerance is spreading like wildfire on both sides,” Ibish

said. Ibish believes the situation is symptomatic of the heightened tension around the violent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. And, he says, it also illustrates how the American media notes the intolerance only on the Arab and Muslim side — while allegedly ignoring what Ibish considers similar behavior from Israelis and Jews.

Duran reportedly has left his home in suburban Washington for a safe house with 24-hour private security. Attempts to contact him by telephone were met with a recording saying the number had been temporarily disconnected.

Despite the uproar, the AJCommittee still believes the book can achieve its purpose of promoting coexistence. Duran’s book will get into the hands of people who need it and will have a tremendous impact, predicted Shula Bahat, AJCommittee’s acting executive director.

“Cooperation will exist where there is a common agenda,” she said.

Bahat said she is not concerned about the media coverage, and that the incident exposes precisely the type of Muslim extremism that Duran has written about.

The AJCommittee noted that Jordan’s Prince Hassan bin Talal characterized the “Children of Abraham” books as “a courageous initiative to promote understanding, wisdom and brotherhood between the Jewish and Muslim communities.”

The books are being translated into Arabic and Turkish. □

Sharon bonds with Berlusconi, making Italian Jews feel uneasy

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — For Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, his visit here with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi appears to have been a love fest.

“My feeling is that I came to pay a visit to an ally,” Sharon said last Friday after his overnight stay in Rome.

“I found a government that is friendly, and a prime minister who is much more than a friend toward Israel,” he said, characterizing the atmosphere as the warmest he had experienced in his recent round of trips to European capitals and Washington.

During his 24-hour stay, Sharon met with Berlusconi, the billionaire tycoon who was sworn in last month as head of a new center-right government.

He also met with Defense Minister Antonio Martino, Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero and President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, and before leaving Rome he briefed some 250 representatives of the Italian Jewish community.

Berlusconi’s administration is considered the most pro-Israel Italian government in years — even though its Cabinet includes members of the National Alliance, a party with neo-fascist roots.

Defense Minister Antonio Martino, for example, is vice president of the Italian Friends of Israel. Sharon did not meet with controversial National Alliance leader Gianfranco Fini, who serves as Berlusconi’s deputy prime minister.

But his apparent embrace of the Berlusconi administration worried some Italian Jewish leaders.

“Part of the governing coalition still looks back on the former fascist regime with some nostalgia. We must remember that the fascist regime” searched for “Jews to hand them to the Nazis,” Amos Luzzatto, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, told reporters. □