



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel augments West Bank force

Israel reinforced its troops around Palestinian cities in the West Bank in response to what it called an escalation in Palestinian violence.

As increased numbers of troops and tanks took up new positions, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon denied that Wednesday's move was part of plans to "reconquer" areas under control of the Palestinian Authority.

Additional soldiers arrived at existing West Bank checkpoints early Wednesday. Others took up positions along roads, stopping and searching passing cars. No figures were available on the exact size of the buildup.

U.S. balks at anti-terror request

The U.S. State Department has expressed reservations about an Israeli request to include two Palestinian organizations, the Tanzim militias and the Force 17 presidential guard, on its list of terrorist groups, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Bush administration officials have described Israel's request as "problematic" because of the two groups' ties to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, diplomatic sources in Jerusalem told the paper.

Palestinians fire on Gilo

Palestinian gunmen directed heavy machine-gun fire at Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood on Wednesday, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Israeli soldiers returned fire at the Palestinians, who were positioned in the nearby Arab town of Beit Jalla. Earlier, Palestinians fired shots at an Israeli army position in the Jewish neighborhood of Hebron, but there were no casualties and soldiers did not return fire.

Claims Conference turns 50

The U.S. deputy secretary of state reaffirmed the United States' commitment to Holocaust restitution.

Richard Armitage made the commitment during an appearance Wednesday in Washington before the Claims Conference, which is marking its 50th anniversary this week.

Friend of assassin pardoned

Israeli President Moshe Katsav decided to pardon Margalit Har-Shefi, sentenced to nine months in prison for failing to prevent the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. [Page 4]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

After Yad Vashem's mural 'rescue,' questions and recriminations linger

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Yad Vashem's secretive and controversial acquisition of a Holocaust-era mural two months ago has inspired not just international anger, but a bitter joke circulating on the Internet.

Why, poses the joke, didn't representatives of the Jerusalem-based Holocaust museum appear at a recent ceremony commemorating the 1,600 Jews murdered in 1941 in the Polish village of Jedwabne?

The museum said it boycotted the ceremony because a plaque at the site does not acknowledge that it was Poles, not Germans, who massacred the Jews.

But the joke's punch line offers a different explanation: "Because there were no murals to be had."

"That kind of joke wouldn't have happened before, because Yad Vashem had huge moral authority," said Konstanty Gebert, a Polish Jewish journalist and editor of the Polish Jewish magazine *Midrasz*.

Speaking at a New York forum on the implications of Yad Vashem's "rescue" of a mural by Bruno Schulz, which angered Polish and Ukrainian officials, Gebert reflected the dominant view of panelists and audience members: The action was a grave, perhaps even immoral, mistake.

The controversy occurs amid larger questions over who has the right to heirless Jewish property, particularly items confiscated during the Holocaust.

Such debates have intensified since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations and with the push toward restitution for slave labor and seized properties.

Yet it also comes at a time when Eastern European governments are perceived as being cooperative in Jewish restitution matters and as Jewish life has enjoyed a revival in Eastern Europe.

Another factor is that the Holocaust increasingly is seen as more than just a Jewish issue, but — particularly as ethnic cleansing and genocide have resurfaced in other parts of the world — as an international symbol of evil.

Wesley Fisher, a panelist who is director of external affairs for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, noted that with widespread interest in the Holocaust and a proliferation of Holocaust museums, "It's not surprising that the demand for Holocaust-related items is growing like mad."

Convened this week by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and the American Jewish Committee, the forum was attended by approximately 40 Jewish artists, thinkers and museum officials.

Several speakers suggested that the move threatens ongoing restitution negotiations with European governments and is an example of Israeli insensitivity toward Jews in the Diaspora.

Representatives of the Ukrainian and Polish governments were invited to the forum, but did not attend. Yad Vashem, which is widely viewed as the international guardian of Holocaust memory, sent representatives to the event and was defended by two panelists.

The defenders did not provide new information about the decision to remove the mural.

Museum officials would not comment further.

A Polish Jew known more for his magical realist writing than his visual art, Schulz

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon, Bush confer on violence

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon spoke of the necessity for "the free states of the world to create a unified and joint front" against terrorism, during a phone conversation Tuesday with President Bush.

The prime minister also told the president that Israel will continue to invoke its right to self-defense because the Palestinian Authority is not acting to prevent terrorist activity in its territories.

Israel suspects Jewish militants

Israeli security forces suspect a squad of Jewish militants carried out two shooting attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank last month, according to an Israeli cabinet official.

"We know of one organized squad, no more, and that's already too many," Deputy Public Security Minister Gideon Ezra told Israel Radio on Wednesday, adding that its members could be from Israel or from Israeli settlements.

After the fatal shooting of a Palestinian in the West Bank on June 13, Israel Radio received a message claiming responsibility from a group calling itself "Shalhevet Gilad," a combination of the names of an slain Israeli infant and settler.

Terrorists planned airport attack

Israeli security officials recently captured members of an Iraqi-trained Palestinian terror cell who planned to carry out a car-bombing attack at Ben-Gurion International Airport, Army Radio reported Wednesday. The West Bank-based cell backed off the attack after reconnaissance showed heavy security around the airport, according to the report.

Peres: It's Arafat or no one

Israel must talk with Yasser Arafat not because he is a "partner for peace," but because he is the Palestinians' leader, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told British Jewish leaders in London on Wednesday.



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was forced in 1942 to create the mural — scenes from Grimms' fairy tales — to decorate the bedroom of a Nazi officer's child in his hometown of Drohobych, which is now part of Ukraine.

He was murdered shortly afterward by another Nazi officer.

Yad Vashem removed the mural in May, apparently with the permission of local, but not national, authorities.

It has said in a printed statement that it has the "moral right" to the paintings because Schulz was a Jew killed in the Holocaust.

The statement also said that, had it not intervened, the murals would have been neglected, a premise that has been vehemently disputed.

Schulz is considered "one of the key figures of Polish literature in the 20th century" and his work is also popular in Ukraine, Gebert said. Before Yad Vashem claimed the mural, there apparently had been talk of making it the centerpiece of a local museum dedicated to Schulz's life and work.

Ukrainian officials said Yad Vashem's move violates a law barring the removal of pre-1945 cultural objects, art works or antiquities without a special permit.

Polish officials also expressed anger about the move.

Yad Vashem's action — which many have compared to the 1976 Entebbe rescue of Jewish and Israeli hostages in Uganda — sends a bad message to European authorities, said Samuel Gruber, director of the Jewish Heritage Research Center in Syracuse, N.Y.

Jewish leaders have pressured European municipalities to follow certain procedures before doing anything that will affect historic Jewish sites, such as synagogues and cemeteries.

But "when the foremost Holocaust institution comes and does what municipalities have been chastised for doing, it creates chaos," Gruber said.

The dispute, said Poland's Gebert, is not just about Israel flouting European authorities, but about Israel's failure to recognize the resurgence of Jewish life in these countries.

Approximately 400 Jews live in Drohobych, but they were not consulted on the matter.

To say that a Jewish artist's work unquestionably belongs in Jerusalem "invalidates us — not just the small Jewish communities in Ukraine and Poland, but also the Diaspora," Gebert said.

Some speculated about what Schulz himself might have thought of the issue.

Daphne Merkin, a novelist and essayist, said, "Aside from the fact that" Schulz "would have been amused by the whole thing, I think he would have been all for Yad Vashem."

Merkin attributed the internal Jewish debate over the matter to what she called a Jewish tradition of appeasement and "self-abnegation."

"It boggles my imagination to be discussing the rights of the Polish community and of the Jewish community of 400," she said. "If they're that interested, let them to come to Israel" to see the mural.

Tobi Kahn, a visual artist, said, "I love the idea of an Entebbe raid, but what happens if the next time someone goes in and they're taking our work?"

Melvin Jules Bukiet, a novelist and fiction editor of Tikkun magazine, vigorously defended Yad Vashem.

Schulz "lived as a Jew and died as a Jew. I see no more appropriate repository" for his work "than Yad Vashem," said Bukiet, who sits on Yad Vashem's board.

The issue's emotional rawness — linked to leftover pain from the Holocaust, bitterness over the recent Jedwabne controversy and simmering tensions between Israel and the Diaspora — was evident in the testy exchanges.

In making his case that Schulz's work would be better preserved in Israel than in Poland — where Schulz was "not treated very well" — Bukiet displayed a book Schulz had illustrated that was printed in Poland — upside down.

One audience member urged Jews to look beyond the tensions, however.

"I'm particularly frightened at this moment, given the geopolitical situation, to be sitting here publicly criticizing Israel about its moral fiber," said Gabe Goldstein, a curator at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York. "The priority is remembering the Holocaust." □

JEWISH WORLD

Seven years since AMIA blast

A Jewish group organized a memorial service and protest Wednesday outside the Argentine Consulate in New York to mark the seventh anniversary of a deadly bomb blast at the Jewish communal headquarters in Buenos Aires.

Rabbi Avi Weiss, national president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, said the perpetrators of the attack "could well be an alliance of Arab extremists and Nazis still living in Argentina."

Argentine officials have not found those responsible for the July 18, 1994, bombing at the AMIA headquarters, which killed 86 people and wounded about 300.

Argentina plans to try 20 people linked to the attack in September. But according to a forthcoming report by the American Jewish Committee, those responsible for actually carrying out the bombing may never be identified.

JCRC offers reward for vandals

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York is offering \$2,000 for information leading to the conviction of those responsible for spray-painting swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on seven homes and a synagogue in the Midwood section of Brooklyn on Monday.

"The individuals responsible for this crime intended to strike terror into the hearts of the people of this neighborhood," the JCRC said. "This reward signals our solidarity with the community."

Minchah service hits the road

The U.S. Conservative movement is trying to get its congregants to devote 15 minutes each day for the afternoon Minchah service, even if they are unable to go to synagogue.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is distributing wallet-sized, laminated foldouts with the service's prayers and translations.

In another development, the U.S. Conservative movement has developed a Shabbat morning ceremony of blessings that recognize and express pride in a congregation's high school graduates who are leaving for college. "The beginning of a college education has become as much a life-cycle event in most Jewish families as birth and Bar and Bat Mitzvah," said Richard Moline, director of the United Synagogue's college outreach program.

Russian day school hit by fire

A suspicious fire caused extensive damage last Friday to the only Jewish day school in the Russian city of Kazan. The school, now closed for repairs, has roughly 400 students. Earlier last week, anti-Semitic inscriptions appeared on the local synagogue.

FIRST PERSON

Orchestra plays Wagner encore, but real performance is the debate

By Rabbi Leon A. Morris

NEW YORK (JTA) — The opportunity to hear the German State Orchestra, Staatskapelle Berlin, perform in Jerusalem was in itself ironic. That Daniel Barenboim, the orchestra's world-famous conductor, is an Israeli Jew made a performance in Jerusalem all the more intriguing.

Moments after Shabbat ended on July 7, two friends and I hurried to the final performance of the Israel Festival at Jerusalem's International Conference Center. The pride audience members felt for the conductor, one of their own, was palpable.

Several months earlier, Barenboim had asked Israel Festival organizers for permission to conduct Richard Wagner's "Die Walkure." Predictably, a storm of protest erupted, and Barenboim agreed to an alternative program.

Wagner's music has been virtually banned in Israel since the establishment of the state because of the composer's virulent anti-Semitism and the use of his music by the Nazis some 60 years after Wagner's death.

As has been widely reported, when the audience demanded a second encore to the concert, Barenboim offered to play Wagner.

Barenboim's determination and cool were balanced by understanding and honor. He spoke of his desire to play the music, as well as the heavy heart with which he did so. He said that he respected those who did not wish to hear it, and asked them to leave.

But Barenboim asserted his belief that, in a democracy, the will of the majority should not be held captive to the wishes of a vocal minority.

Rivaling the powerful performances of Robert Schumann and Igor Stravinsky that we had just heard was the debate that ensued over the Wagner encore, a quintessential example of what is best and worst about Israel.

During a 40-minute dispute, a kind of impromptu town hall meeting, audience members rose to speak passionately in front of a thousand people they didn't know. There was shouting, and even some Jewish legal reasoning: One man argued that though he opposed placing Wagner on the program, an encore technically occurs after the program has concluded, so he couldn't object.

On both sides of the debate, there was a recognition of the power of symbolism in Israel's national life. People stormed out — then returned to the hall in order to storm out again.

The overwhelming majority, who wanted to hear Wagner, did not share Barenboim's gentleness and understanding: They shouted at their opponents simply to "go home." But they were home; that is precisely the point. They all were engaged in a debate that could only take place at home — a debate about house rules, sensitivity and the symbols of a Jewish state.

It occurred to me that evening that the date of the concert was significant. It occurred on the eve of the 17th of Tammuz, just prior to a fast commemorating the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E.

On this particular 17th of Tammuz, walls again had been breached.

For those who opposed playing Wagner in Jerusalem, the performance breached a wall that protects and guards the memory of the Holocaust in Israeli consciousness. To allow Wagner to be played, some would argue, is to allow the distinctive historical consciousness of the Jewish people to be pierced or even destroyed.

But those who wanted to hear Wagner also considered this performance a breach in a wall.

For them, citizens' freedom to make decisions about their cultural life breaks down the walls that prevent Israel from becoming a full democracy.

Beyond the shouting and the passions aroused by the music, beyond the slamming of concert hall doors and the accusations of "cultural rape," this argument signaled for me not the eventual defeat of a nation — as the 17th of Tammuz had foreshadowed some two millennia ago — but the rich and complex life of a nation creatively debating and defining its national culture. □

Rabbi Leon A. Morris is the director of the Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning, scheduled to open in September at Temple Emanu-El in New York.

ARTS & CULTURE

King Solomon's angst is material for British Jew's one-man shows*By Richard Allen Greene*

LONDON (JTA) — "The prophet Elijah would not sit down for coffee at Starbucks," Marcus Freed says confidently. "He would obliterate it."

Solomon "slept with a lot of people and got in trouble for it, Job would be on Prozac if he lived today," Freed adds, and the judge Deborah "would not be the kind of person you would want on a date."

He muses for a moment. "Or maybe you would."

The British actor and one-time yeshiva student has given a lot of thought to biblical figures, especially Elijah and Solomon — he's created one-man shows about each.

And after 18 months of working on those two characters, he's thinking about a much broader project.

"I would love to create a complete biblical series, like Shakespeare's history plays. The Bible is a massive resource to Jewish writers," he says. "Shakespeare had Latin and Italian chronicles. This is what we have."

He stumbled onto the project almost by accident, when he was asked to create a performance for a Jewish education workshop in December 1999.

His only instruction was that the piece be about time.

He knew the famous "a time to be born, a time to die" passage from Ecclesiastes, and decided to write a piece that would end with Solomon writing those words.

"I like Solomon's teen-age angst — when he's 60," Freed says.

The performance got a standing ovation.

"And, accidentally, my career goes in a different direction," Freed says with a smile and a shrug.

Since then, the performances have quite literally taken him in many directions, from Israel to South Africa, Mexico to Hungary. He's performed in venues from stone amphitheaters in South America to a five-star kosher hotel overlooking the Mediterranean in the south of France.

Performing plays about biblical characters involves walking something of a tightrope, Freed says.

"I'm remaining true to Torah and midrash," he says. "I'm not bastardizing it, not trying to twist it, preach, convert or missionize."

There is an educational aspect to his work, he says, "but that's a side thing. I want to entertain the audience."

That's part of the reason he's made sure the pieces have strong comic elements.

"Elijah has some 'Star Wars' parody," he says. "There's a lot of shtick — but it's all true to what's going on. You set up the conventions and let it go."

Freed is part of a tradition of fusing theater and education that includes the Besht Tellers and Joyce Klein, says educator Joel Grishaver, who has worked with the British actor.

At the same time, "Marcus is in no way derivative. He's completely original," Grishaver told JTA.

Freed is also working on adapting Solomon for film, and thinking about which biblical figures he'll tackle next.

The first king of Israel appeals to him.

"Saul was really screwed up. That's the great thing about Jewish heroes," Freed says.

But there's screwed up, and then there's screwed up.

"I wanted to do Samson because I have a lot of hair," Freed says, gesturing to the curly ponytail under his yarmulke and baseball cap.

But Samson was a "psycho with a misogynistic view of relationships," he says. "I worked on it to see if there was something I could work with, and the answer was no."

But Freed has not ruled out portraying Samson.

"I might come back to it," he says. "Different characters speak to you at different times." □

Old wounds in Israel are reopened as friend of Rabin slayer goes free*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli President Moshe Katsav has commuted the nine-month sentence of a woman who failed to prevent the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

As a result of Katsav's decision Wednesday, Margalit Har-Shefi will be released from jail on Aug. 10, after serving two-thirds of her sentence.

In June 1998, a Tel Aviv court found Har-Shefi guilty of knowing of Yigal Amir's plot to assassinate Rabin, yet failing to act to prevent it.

Har-Shefi maintained throughout her trial that she thought Amir was merely boasting of plans to assassinate the prime minister, but the court found what it considered inconsistencies in her testimony.

Katsav said Wednesday that Har-Shefi had paid her debt to society and had expressed regret over the assassination. He also said she was unable to adhere to religious observances in existing prison facilities for women.

The move comes after the Supreme Court rejected appeals Har-Shefi filed both against her conviction and her sentence, and after the parole board rejected a request to release her after serving half her sentence.

The decision stirred strong political reactions linked to the 1995 assassination by Amir, a right-wing, religious student opposed to Rabin's land-for-peace policies with the Palestinians.

Rabin's daughter, Deputy Defense Minister Dalia Rabin-Pelosoff, said Wednesday the president's decision had caused a "searing pain."

"We have to wonder what lessons were learned" from the assassination, she said.

Opposition leader Yossi Sarid said wryly that after both the courts and parole board concluded that Har-Shefi failed to demonstrate remorse, only the president had managed to perceive her concealed regret.

The leader of the left-wing Shinui Party, Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, said he expects Katsav's next move will be to nominate Amir for the Israel Prize.

On the right, there was praise for the move.

Shaul Yahalom of the National Religious Party said Har-Shefi should neither have been tried nor sent to jail.

Knesset member Michael Kleiner of the right-wing Herut Party said nothing can compensate for the injustice done to Har-Shefi.

Right-wingers long have pointed to an apparent inconsistency: Har-Shefi was sent to jail for failing to prevent the assassination, while Amir's handler in the Shin Bet, Avishai Raviv, has not suffered any legal penalty for allegedly pushing Amir to translate his ideology into murderous action. □