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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Terror hits Tel Aviv streets

A Palestinian gunman opened fire on a street outside Israel's Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv, lightly wounding 10 people, most of them soldiers.

Witnesses said the gunman stopped his car Sunday at an intersection, opened the door and began firing.

After he drove on, police opened fire on the car, seriously wounding the gunman, who later died of his wounds.

Police said the gunman was a married father of three from eastern Jerusalem.

Cheney supports Israeli strikes

Vice President Dick Cheney said Israel could have "some justification" when it deliberately kills Palestinians thought to be planning bombings.

Cheney told Fox News that if Israel has hard evidence of a suicide bombing plot then there is some justification in trying to protect itself by preempting an attack.

The official U.S. position is that it opposes the Jewish state's policy of targeted killing of Palestinian militants.

Barghouti aide wounded in attack

An aide to West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti was wounded when Israeli helicopters fired on a convoy of cars near Ramallah. Some Palestinian sources said Barghouti, the leader of Fatah's Tanzim militias, was in the convoy, while others said he was in his office at the time.

Israel security sources denied that Barghouti was the target, noting that his aide had been involved in numerous terror attacks during the past 10 months of violence.

However, the sources did not rule out that the operation could serve as a warning to Barghouti.

Following the Israeli attack, Barghouti vowed that Israel would "pay for this new crime."

Peace activists march in Tel Aviv

Thousands of peace activists marched through Tel Aviv demanding an end to the 10-month-old Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Saturday's protest was the largest demonstration by the Israeli peace camp since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took office in February.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Senator to help find hostages, but U.N. says some may have died

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For 10 months, the families of four Israelis kidnapped by Hezbollah have been waiting for their loved ones to return home.

Now the families have found a new source of hope, after U.S. lawmakers and Jewish groups indicated that the families' crusade has not been forgotten and that a new effort will be launched to get the four back.

But amid the uncertainty they have had to contend with since the abductions, the families now have to deal with a U.N. report indicating that as many as three of the four kidnap victims may have suffered serious injuries when they were abducted across the Israeli-Lebanese border — and that some or all of them may no longer be alive.

Last October, Hezbollah gunmen kidnapped three Israeli soldiers — Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad — from a disputed border area known as Shabaa Farms. Shortly after, Hezbollah kidnapped an Israeli businessman, Elhanan Tannenbaum, who also serves as a colonel in the Israeli reserves.

Last week, appearing outside the U.S. Senate, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) announced he would take part in an international commission to get information about the four and secure their release. There has been no word from Hezbollah about the condition or fate of the prisoners despite repeated attempts by the families and the International Red Cross to gain information and access to the men.

"These families deserve to know," McCain said when he made his announcement Aug. 2.

McCain also said he would work with Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) on legislation calling for increased U.S. involvement in the effort to bring the four Israelis home.

His comment came one day before U.N. officials released a report indicating that the three Israeli soldiers who were kidnapped suffered serious, possibly even critical, injuries.

Many feel McCain's prominence will speed along a solution and that the senator's personal history will raise the issue's profile.

In 1967, McCain, a naval aviator, was shot down over Vietnam and held as a POW in Hanoi for five-and-a-half years, much of it in solitary confinement.

"All of Israel appreciates his efforts," Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, said last week.

McCain accepted a pin depicting a blue ribbon of solidarity for the MIAs. Many officials wore stickers that read "Adi, Benjamin, Omar — Mother is Waiting."

The atmosphere at last week's announcement on the Senate steps — attended by the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and other groups — was disturbed somewhat by protesters who shouted and held placards with such anti-Israel slogans as: "Condemn Israel's Aggression" and "Free Palestinian POWs in Israel."

The families of the four kidnap victims came to Washington to thank those involved with the increased efforts, including Israeli Ambassador David Ivry and former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

The family members were hopeful, but their words were mixed with pain.

After so many disappointments, Avitan's father, Ya'acov, said he was optimistic that the new commission is now "a turning point."

Saoud's father, Qassem, said his son's children, ages 3 and 5, cry for their father every day. Tannenbaum's son, Ori, said, "I am haunted by anxiety day and night."

Avraham Burg, the speaker of the Israeli Knesset, said he wants to continue

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel kills Hamas member

Israel killed a Hamas member in what Palestinian witnesses said was a helicopter missile strike on his car in the West Bank city of Tulkarm. Israel said Amar Madiri was preparing suicide attacks inside Israel.

Madiri was an assistant to Fuza Badran, a Hamas explosives expert killed last month in Tulkarm when his car exploded. The Palestinian Authority blamed Israel for Badran's death, but Israel did not take responsibility for that incident.

Earlier Sunday, Israeli helicopters fired rockets at Palestinian police headquarters in the southern Gaza Strip. Israel said the attack followed repeated Palestinian mortar attacks on Jewish settlements and Israeli army outposts in Gaza. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Gilo again comes under attack

Israeli security forces battled Palestinian gunmen firing on Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood. In what was described as some of the heaviest fighting in months, gunfire echoed through Jerusalem on Saturday night after Palestinian gunmen in the nearby Arab town of Beit Jalla opened fire on Gilo, drawing a heavy Israeli response. Fourteen Gilo apartments were damaged.

Tel Aviv bombing averted

A bombing was averted at the Tel Aviv Central Bus Station last Friday when a security guard noticed a 23-year-old Palestinian woman carrying a suspicious package that turned out to contain more than eight pounds of explosives wrapped in nails. A bomb squad safely detonated the device.

Man to be extradited to U.S.

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that Haim Berger, a fervently Orthodox Jew who immigrated to Israel from the United States, should be extradited immediately to the United States, where he faces fraud charges involving some \$20 million.

pressuring the United Nations and the Red Cross and drumming up international support.

"This is a process which addresses the conscience of the world," he said.

A day later, U.N. officials provided some information about the kidnapping of the three soldiers.

In an 18-page report released last Friday, the officials presented the findings of an internal U.N. investigation into the handling of a videotape shot at the scene hours after the three soldiers were kidnapped.

After denying for months that a videotape existed, U.N. officials reversed course last month and ordered an investigation.

The report included the assessment of a senior U.N. peacekeeper in Lebanon that the three soldiers may have died from their wounds.

It also indicated that there were not one but two videotapes.

The report acknowledged that U.N. officials had failed to keep Israel informed, but that this had resulted from "lapses in judgment and failures to communicate, not from conspiracies."

The report left open questions regarding the role some U.N. peacekeepers may have played in the kidnapping.

Israeli officials later said they appreciated U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's willingness to launch an investigation. But the officials criticized the United Nations for taking so long to offer information about the soldiers' possible condition.

Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said this week the Israeli defense establishment is working under the assumption that the soldiers are still alive.

"We have no information to say they are not alive," Ben-Eliezer said in television interviews over the weekend.

An Israeli team will travel to New York to review items collected by U.N. forces from the vehicles Hezbollah used in the kidnapping. Bloodstained items are expected to be checked by a third party, most likely the World Health Organization, for identification, and the results will then be conveyed to Israel.

Haim Avraham, father of one of the kidnapped soldiers, protested that the Israeli team has to travel to New York.

"This information in my opinion should be sent to Israel. We claimed all the time that the U.N. has a videotape of the kidnapping and items belonging to the soldiers."

Avraham also said he believed U.N. officials have additional "important details about the kidnapping of the boys, which must be disclosed."

For months, contacts have been held via third parties regarding an exchange of the Israeli abductees for Arab prisoners held by Israel.

Portions of one of the videos have already been broadcast on Israel's Channel Two Television. They show U.N. officials trying to tow two cars that were apparently used by the kidnapers and later abandoned.

A U.N. spokesman who viewed the video said that the cars contained bloodstains, explosive materials and equipment belonging to the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, as the peacekeepers are known.

According to reports, the cars had forged UNIFIL license plates.

Rallies and protests over the past several months have sought to increase awareness about the four kidnap victims. At a rally last month in New York, campers from Young Judea's Tel Yehudah solicited signatures for a petition calling on U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and other political leaders to take action.

Israel has also been seeking information about three soldiers missing in action in Lebanon since 1982.

Zachariah Baumel, Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz disappeared in June 1982, in the Battle of Sultan Yakoub at the beginning of Israel's war in Lebanon.

Their families have since launched an international effort to obtain information regarding their whereabouts.

In 1999, President Clinton signed a law that requires the United States to raise the cases of the three MIAs when it meets with the governments of Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.

In addition, the law calls on U.S. officials to take into consideration the willingness of the three governments to help secure the return of such soldiers when considering financial aid.

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

98 senators press Putin on racism

A U.S.-based group working on behalf of Jews in the former Soviet Union applauded a letter from 98 U.S. senators to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing concern about anti-Semitism in Russia.

Sent last Friday, the letter "underscores the American commitment to minority rights and freedom of religion as an integral component of the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship," said NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

U.S. lawmakers back U.N. forum

Jewish and African-American lawmakers are circulating a letter to colleagues, supporting the mission of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism but condemning the "Zionism equals racism" language proposed in the conference's draft report.

The two communities are urging the United States to attend the conference, which begins Aug. 31, and are supporting African-American efforts to discuss reparations for slavery.

Swastika adorns Russian church

A Russian Orthodox priest topped the dome of a rural church 150 miles from Moscow with a cross featuring swastikas, according to Russian media reports.

The man, identified as Father Sergei, collects Nazi paraphernalia and is a member of an ultranationalist group.

Claiming that the swastika is an ancient Orthodox symbol, he visits his parishioners in a van with a large swastika painted on it.

Forward station to air sports talk

A New York radio station that once had programming in Yiddish as well as Hebrew, Greek, Korean, Polish and other languages will change its format to sports talk.

The Forward Association, which owns WEVD-AM, said it may sell the radio station at some point and is making the move to sustain the group's newspaper operations.

Russian school closing protested

The Jewish community of the Russian city of Kazan is protesting the closing of the local Jewish school, according to NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

Kazan's mayor closed the school after a fire destroyed it on July 13.

The mayor said a Jewish school should not be allowed to operate in a non-Jewish neighborhood, according to NCSJ.

Holocaust memorial's ad campaign falls victim to angry critics' attacks

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — In the heart of Berlin's government center, near the Brandenburg Gate, there is a billboard poster of snow-topped mountains and a pristine blue lake.

The idyllic image contrasts starkly with the words printed over it: "The Holocaust Never Happened."

This controversial attempt to raise funds campaign for Berlin's planned national Holocaust memorial will soon come to an end now that Holocaust survivors and German Jewish leaders have joined in condemning it.

Smaller text underneath the headline reads: "There are still many people who make this claim. In 20 years, there could be even more."

Just the same, Jewish leaders had complained that the ad could fan racial hatred.

Last Friday, the organizers of the campaign — who said they had chosen the provocative ad in an effort to stimulate discussion and drum up donations — announced the advertising effort's early demise.

Billboards featuring the slogan will come down in mid-August, instead of in September as originally planned, said Lea Rosh, the head of the foundation responsible for the fund-raising campaign.

Rosh, the non-Jewish television personality who championed the cause of the memorial for more than 10 years, said Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, has convinced her to abandon the campaign.

Spiegel told reporters last Friday that "the subject of the Holocaust is not suitable for advertising campaigns" and that he would prefer to see the posters disappear immediately. But, he said, Rosh had meant well.

Frankfurt attorney Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council, said last week that "the poster must go." He described its slogan as "unbearable." Other critics had claimed the text beneath the headline is too small to be read easily. □

New center and synagogue reflect rebirth of Munich Jewish community

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — After decades of relative obscurity, Munich's Jewish community is slated to gain a highly public presence with the construction of a \$28 million community center in the heart of the city.

As if to underscore a longing for openness and prominence, the new project will feature a glass-topped synagogue. The current community headquarters, in the city center, is tucked into a small building with an enclosed courtyard.

In announcing the project last week, Charlotte Knobloch, president of Munich's 8,000-member Jewish community, said she hopes it will bring the community out of the shadows in which it has lived since the Holocaust, and firmly into an era of good relations with the non-Jewish majority.

Located on Jakobsplatz in Munich's cultural and political center, the project will include a synagogue, Jewish school, museum and kosher restaurant. It is expected to be completed in 2005.

Munich's liberal mayor, Christian Ude of the Social Democratic Party, said he hopes the project will help heal the wounds of the past and "secure a future for the Jewish community" in Munich. Munich is home to Germany's second largest Jewish community, after Berlin. The country's Jewish population has tripled in the last 10 years with the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

As a result, several new synagogues have been built across Germany in cities whose Jewish communities were destroyed by the Holocaust.

The State of Bavaria will contribute about \$6 million to the project, and the Jewish community hopes to raise some \$5 million from private donations.

The largest portion of the funding, \$17 million, was obtained by selling the land on which Munich's prewar synagogue stood. The building was torn down on Hitler's orders in June 1938. □

Jews blame provincial arson in Russia on a politicians' feud

By Lev Gorodetsky

KOSTROMA, Russia (JTA) — A recent arson attack on the synagogue here is the result of a feud between two local politicians, according to a local Jewish leader.

The 1,500 members of Kostroma's Jewish community are on good terms with the city's mayor — indeed, one community member is a deputy mayor of this city, 250 miles northeast of Moscow.

The mayor, meanwhile, is at odds with the region's governor, who is pro-Communist. The July 29 arson attack is an example of the governor playing the "Jewish card" in the campaign for the upcoming mayoral election, says Andrei Osherov, the leader of Kostroma's Jews.

It's not uncommon for Russian Jews to get caught in a power struggle between two politicians, particularly in provincial areas.

But in this case the situation has led to a series of anti-Semitic outbursts. At a recent demonstration by the local branch of the Communist Party protesting the new Land Code — which allows for the privatization of land in Russia — participants carried anti-Semitic posters, including "Kike-oligarchs have thrown the country under the NATO boot of the Kike cabal."

In addition, openly anti-Semitic inscriptions calling to finish Hitler's work appeared on walls near the synagogue.

The arson attack — which occurred on the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av — caused no substantial damage, perhaps as a result of Genrietta Golovina, the synagogue's librarian.

Golovina went to open a window on the hot afternoon and saw flames climbing up the outside of the building.

Within an hour, firemen had put out the flames on the synagogue, which was built in 1907, closed by the Communists in 1930 and returned to the Jewish community only in the 1990s.

But local Jewish activists say it would be an exaggeration to say that Jews face real danger in this quiet central Russian city. As Osherov puts it, "We have been here and we'll stay here."

The community is growing — with a number of Jewish families moving to Kostroma and other central Russian cities from less quiet regions in the former Soviet Union.

For example, Simon Katsoshvili, who helped to put out the fire, came to Kostroma from Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia.

The Kostroma Jews are supported mainly by the two main community-building structures in Russia — the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which is running a local Chesed charity center, and the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Russia.

The two groups recently funded a \$50,000 restoration of the synagogue, and together are funding a Jewish community center in the same building. The project is a model of cooperation for the two groups.

Kiril Boyarsky, 27, a law student and a Reform Jewish activist, said he intends to stay in Kostroma.

"Many people are discovering that they are Jews," he said. "I think the Jewish community here has a future."

A Lubavitch rabbi comes from Moscow to care for the community, and Osherov says the community is awaiting a full-time rabbi. Lubavitch has a special interest in supporting the local synagogue, a sacred place connected with one of the movement's former leaders, Rebbe Joseph Isaac Schneerson. □

ARTS & CULTURE

TV film offers quirky portrait of Catholic-Jewish friendship

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — "Snow in August" is an offbeat television film — part gritty reality and part fantasy, centered on the curious friendship between an Irish Catholic altar boy and a refugee rabbi in post-World War II Brooklyn.

The two-hour production, based on the 1997 best seller by Pete Hamill, airs Aug. 12 at 8 p.m. on the Showtime channel.

The year is 1947 and the main topic of conversation in Brooklyn, and between Michael Devlin and his parochial school buddies, is the batting average of Jackie Robinson, just signed by the Dodgers as the first black player in baseball's major leagues.

Michael lives in borderline poverty with his mother, an Irish war bride whose husband — Michael's father — was killed in the war.

In the streets outside, an Irish gang terrorizes the neighborhood and kills a Jewish storekeeper, a crime witnessed by Michael. A code against squealing keeps the secret bottled up in the boy.

Actor Stephen Rea says he understands young Michael.

"In a place like Belfast, you have to learn to run very fast or talk very fast," Rea says. "It's a rough and ready life — I grew up with that."

But in an interesting twist, the Irish Protestant actor, best known for his portrayal of an Irish revolutionary in "The Crying Game," was cast as the rabbi — a role Rea says he approached with "a lot of respect and veneration."

Michael meets Rabbi Judah Hirsch, a Holocaust survivor and widower from Prague, who hires the boy as a Shabbos goy, a non-Jew who assists Jews with tasks they're not allowed to perform on the Sabbath. An unlikely friendship blossoms between the two, and in some humorous interludes Michael tries to teach the rabbi English, particularly baseball terminology.

"What's a three-bagger?" Hirsch asks. "A kind of suitcase?"

In return, the rabbi teaches the boy Yiddish and tells him the legend of the Golem, who defended the Jews of Prague.

When the neighborhood gang leader assaults the rabbi and threatens the lives of Michael and his mother, the boy can think of only one protector: He must create his own Golem.

Director-screenwriter Richard Friedenberg has drawn sensitive performances from Rea as the dignified and tormented rabbi, Peter Tambakis as the boy struggling with a sense of justice and responsibility, and from Lolita Davidovich as his mother.

Reflecting on a certain kinship between the Irish and the Jews, Rea spoke of a "shared sense of oppression."

An experience while taping the film in Montreal gave him a taste of the real thing.

As Rea passed through town dressed as the Orthodox rabbi, someone hurled an anti-Semitic remark at him that he found too repulsive even to repeat, leaving him feeling "paralyzed and weak."

"It was shocking to me," he says, "how abuse so readily spilled out of him."

The incident enhanced Rea's commitment to the film, and to honoring Holocaust victims with its message.

"It's about something we should all be on our guard about — that's racism," he says. □

(JTA correspondent Michelle Dardashti in New York contributed to this report.)