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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat free to roam P.A. areas

Yasser Arafat is free to travel throughout areas under Palestinian control, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced Monday.

While lifting the order to keep the Palestinian Authority president under virtual house arrest in Ramallah, Israeli officials said he cannot travel abroad — which Palestinian officials called an outrage.

12 Palestinians die in Gaza raid

At least 12 Palestinians were killed and 80 others wounded during an Israeli raid late Monday on a Gaza refugee camp. Israeli officials said they had launched the operation in the Jabalya camp to find terrorists.

Boy wounded at Bar Mitzvah

A 12-year-old Israeli was seriously wounded Sunday in a Palestinian shooting attack at a Bar Mitzvah in Ashdod.

Police apprehended the gunman, who fled the scene after his gun jammed. A search for two other suspected accomplices was called off Monday, after police concluded the Palestinians had already escaped to areas under Palestinian control.

Fatah men may make terror list

The U.S. State Department is close to adding the Al-Aksa Brigades to its list of foreign terrorist organizations, JTA has learned.

"If they've committed the actions they've claimed, they are definitely worthy" of the designation, a State Department official said. The group is the military arm of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

U.S. officials are now determining whether the organization actually committed all the attacks it took responsibility for, and is determining its affiliations to other terrorist groups. An announcement may come as early as next month, when the State Department's annual Patterns of Global Terrorism report is released.

New Shoah council head named

A Houston businessman was named to be the new chair of the group that oversees the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Last Friday, President Bush named Fred Zeidman, who is involved in several Jewish organizations, to chair the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli morale at all-time low as search for answers goes on

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As a wave of terror attacks and shootings shake the usual shrug-it-off Israeli mentality, there is an increasing sense that the government is not doing enough to improve the situation.

On the left, a growing number of voices is calling for the government to unilaterally leave the territories.

On the right, people are demanding that the government crush the Palestinian Authority, and bring security back to Israel.

"Our message is a national consensus against terror and that it has to be fought with a certain degree of tenacity, and not every other day of the week," said Ezra Rosenfeld, director of the foreign desk for Yesha, the umbrella organization for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Twenty-seven Israelis were killed in the past week, changing the tone and urgency of this nearly 18-month-old intifada.

In response, the Israel Defense Force has increased military actions against the Palestinian Authority, including destroying Yasser Arafat's Gaza headquarters and returning in force to Palestinian cities and refugee camps.

But for the Peace Coalition, which includes Peace Now, Meretz, the Labor doves, and the secular kibbutzim, among others, military action isn't the right response.

Their message is simple: The cycle of killing and revenge can only be broken by a bold political initiative.

"For the first time since the intifada began, we've been able to create a voice that can't be ignored in Israeli public debate," said Didi Remez, a spokesman for Peace Now.

"It's obvious that a majority of Israelis are looking for answers, and they aren't willing to hear the same mantras."

Now, for the first time in months, they're coming out again.

As the Sabbath ended on March 2, a Palestinian suicide bomber exploded in a religious neighborhood in Jerusalem, killing 10 people.

Minutes later, a previously planned Peace Now and Peace Coalition march and rally began nearby, with more than 3,000 people in attendance.

Two weeks earlier, more than 15,000 people attended a march and rally at Tel Aviv's Rabin Square, according to Peace Now figures. It had been months since Israel's peacenik groups have been able to gather their forces.

With their nonviolent stance, they had to figure out how to balance their message with the increasingly frequent and violent actions of the Palestinian Authority.

They avoided vigils and demonstrations, keeping gatherings small and modest. Even during the recent rally in Jerusalem, the demonstrators marched in silence. They carried candles and signs designed as death notices, printed with the inscription, "We mourn the deaths of 1,124 Israelis and Palestinians."

But for those on the right, figuring out the solution to the current situation isn't a matter of the left versus the right.

According to Yesha's Rosenfeld, the Israeli population is nearly unanimous on the issue of destroying terror and terror organizations.

"If at one point people thought Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria were the problem, that number has decreased," he said. "The left has become, at least for the present, marginalized."

As the government and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet argue over what

MIDEAST FOCUS

6 Palestinians killed

Israeli troops and tanks entered the West Bank town of Kalkilya on Monday in a search for terrorists. Two Palestinians were killed in clashes there with the soldiers.

Also on Monday, Israeli troops entered the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, where soldiers killed two Palestinians and wounded two others.

In another incident Monday, one Palestinian was shot and killed by troops south of Hebron after he ignored orders to stop his car. A sixth Palestinian was reported killed in the Netzarim area of the Gaza Strip.

Police kill would-be bomber

Jerusalem's police chief permitted security forces to kill a captured terrorist. In an incident that took place last Friday, Israeli security forces apprehended the would-be suicide bomber north of Jerusalem.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the terrorist resisted when police bomb experts tried to disarm his explosives belt. The paper said the Palestinian kept trying to trigger the explosive device. As a result, the Jerusalem police chief gave approval to shoot the terrorist in the head.

Payment for wedding hall victims

A panel investigating a wedding hall collapse in Israel recommended compensation for the families of the 23 people killed in last year's disaster. The panel recommended a one-time payment of about \$17,400 dollars to each family. In the case of a family that lost more than one member, the panel recommended a payment of approximately \$21,700.

The panel's recommendations must now be approved by a parliamentary committee. Along with the 23 killed, more than 200 others were injured when the hall's ceiling collapsed. The builders and owners of the hall received jail terms after it was determined that shoddy construction methods were at fault.



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direction to take, the grass-roots groups are gathering strength, looking to broaden their constituencies. For now, it seems to be the battle of the rallies. Yesha held a rally in Rabin Square on Monday night, but it wasn't a political rally, Rosenfeld said.

The organizers aren't talking about bringing down the government or supporting it. Despite recent comments made by Sharon regarding his willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians while under fire, Yesha isn't responding.

Rather, their message is a national consensus against terror.

"If we're making a political statement, we are patting 'Arik' Sharon on the back for the moment," said Rosenfeld.

"We can't say we're particularly happy with his seven-day statement," he added, referring to Sharon's declaration that he was no longer requiring seven days of quiet to institute a cease-fire.

"As it stands now, there's no difference between seven or two days because there aren't six hours without shooting incidents."

Similarly, Peace Now isn't talking politics either. At least, not specifically.

The organization recently unveiled its new campaign, "Get Out of the Territories — Get Back to Ourselves."

Every weekend, activists distribute materials at traffic intersections and hold vigils at the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv and the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem.

They were there on Sunday, the day after a suicide bombing that killed 11 at the Moment Cafe near the prime minister's Jerusalem residence.

So were a group of young settlers, who came to offer support to the IDF, said one of the demonstrators. "Peace and security, Sharon style," read one of the Peace Now signs, which included the total fatalities to date — 961 Palestinians; 340 Israelis.

Several of the young residents from the settlements sat on the curb outside the bombed cafe, reading psalms and wrapped in an Israeli flag.

"It will take a while for us to get back to the center," said Remez. "The gut instinct for revenge is strong and re-emerges every time there's a bombing."

At the same time, he believes the numbers are there.

With 40 percent to 50 percent of Israelis considered in the center, and the other 50 percent split between the right and the left, Peace Now is looking to gain those in the center, the confused core.

"It's a question of creating an alternative public voice," Remez said.

"In the short term, it has a moderating influence. In the long term, we want to build an infrastructure that will be a basis for an alternative, and when the political situation is viable, to be able to step in."

In the meantime, it seems the left is either louder — or has more money — than those on the right. Over the last few weeks, full-page newspaper ads and billboards with graphic images of recent victims have been sponsored by the Parents Circle: Israelis and Palestinians for Peace.

Using a \$1.5 million budget gathered from donations in Europe, the United States and Israel, the group of Israeli and Palestinian families is seeking joint conciliation.

With attention-grabbing headlines such as, "Mr. Prime Minister: What else needs to happen before you decide to negotiate?!" and "Ariel Sharon. Yasser Arafat. What are you waiting for?" the group is seeing grass-roots results, said Yitzhak Frankental, who heads the organization. "People say, 'Finally, someone's doing something,'" he said.

Another new protest group, the Seventh Day — named for the day they say will complete the 1967 Six-Day War — has developed, calling for withdrawal from the territories, which Israel captured during that war.

And there are the growing number of army reservists refusing to serve in the territories, one of whom recently had an Op-Ed published in The New York Times.

IDF officials have said that the March draft — one of three each year — will be the most problematic the army has had in a long time.

And Israeli morale is at an all-time low. Streets are emptier than usual, in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as people avoid public places for fear of terrorist attacks.

In Jerusalem, cafes were mostly empty following Saturday night's attack.

Aroma, a popular coffee shop on Emek Refaim Street, had stacked up its tables and chairs, and was only offering takeout coffee to its customers.

"I don't have any answers," said Dudi, who was ringing up customers' orders.

"But I know one thing: People aren't going to sit drinking coffee if they're worried about getting blown up." □

JEWISH WORLD

Students to leave Israel early

The Reform movement's seminary is permitting North American students at its Jerusalem campus to go home early.

Rabbi David Ellenson, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's president, said in a statement that the escalating violence in Jerusalem has prevented the university from maintaining the "integrity" of its year-in-Israel program for first-year rabbinic, cantorial and education students, and that students will have the choice of completing the remaining four academic weeks of the program in Jerusalem or North America.

However, HUC-JIR's year-in-Israel program for the coming academic year is continuing as planned, officials said. Sixty students are participating in the program and 15 plan to leave early.

Arson suspected in shul fire

Officials suspect that arson was the cause of a fire Monday that damaged Toronto's historic Anshei Minsk Synagogue.

The 72-year-old synagogue has been the only facility offering daily prayer services in downtown Toronto.

Lubavitch remember 9/11

Hundreds of Lubavitch rabbis and emissaries paid tribute to victims of Sept. 11 at the Pentagon.

The participants — who were in Washington for a conference marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of the spiritual leader of the movement, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson — sang "Oseh Shalom" and "God Bless America" at 9:38 a.m. Monday, the time a passenger plane hit the Pentagon on Sept. 11.

The rebbe supported the armed services of the United States and taught that the response to evil must not be fear but faith and optimism, said Rabbi Levi Shemtov, the director of the Washington office of American Friends of Lubavitch.

A U.S. Army official told the group, "Your prayers and support will heal the wounds that were inflicted on the United States."

Jewish scientists unite

A new group wants to promote scientific research on issues affecting world Jewry and Israel.

The World Congress of Jewish Scientists hopes to encourage interdisciplinary initiatives in genetics, energy, water studies and computer science.

The group, which is forming in Israel this week, wants to hold master classes for top scientists and create a museum highlighting the contributions of Jewish scientists. The Jewish Agency for Israel is behind the group's formation.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Spanish Jews outraged over plan to honor queen who expelled Jews

By Hillel Landes

MADRID (JTA) — Jewish groups are outraged that Spanish bishops have asked Pope John Paul II to canonize Queen Isabella I, who expelled Jews in 1492 and instituted the Inquisition.

The controversial canonization has essentially been on hold since it was first proposed in the 1950s by a Spanish archbishop.

At a meeting last week, however, the country's bishops voted 60-20 to recommend that the Vatican move ahead with the process for Isabella's beatification, the last step before making her a saint.

Monsignor Juan Jose Asenjo, spokesman for the Spanish Roman Catholic Church, said the bishops consider Isabella "an exemplary Christian."

He said the recommendation for sainthood should not be seen as an endorsement of her political actions. Nevertheless, Carlos Schorr, secretary-general of the Federation of Spanish Jewish Communities, condemned the decision.

"As a Jew, I'm not going to interfere with whom the church wants to make a saint," Schorr said. "But I'm surprised that in the 21st century they should want to canonize someone who is known for religious intolerance and all the suffering she caused."

Queen Isabella I and her husband, King Ferdinand, ended seven centuries of Islamic rule in Spain, during which Judaism had the "Golden Age," which produced great scholars such as Maimonides and Judah Halevi.

The "Catholic Monarchs" gave all Jews the choice of conversion or flight, leading to the infamous expulsion of Spain's Jews in 1492.

They also established the Inquisition, which condemned false converts and heretics to torture and death by burning at the stake.

Schorr thought it was unlikely the Vatican would canonize the queen, but added, "I'm prepared for surprises. After all, they are canonizing Pope Pius IX."

Jewish groups protested the beatification two years ago of the 19th-century Pius IX, who abducted a Jewish boy to be raised as a Christian and was the last pope to confine Jews to the ghetto.

The Vatican has also drawn criticism for canonizing Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who perished at Auschwitz.

Lately, controversy has surged over church plans to canonize Pope Pius XII, who was largely silent about the Nazi genocide against the Jews when he reigned during World War II. Some non-Jewish Spaniards also protested the bishops' vote.

"Saints are put forward as models for emulation for believing Catholics, of whom there are many in Spain," the left-leaning national newspaper El Pais wrote in an editorial.

However, the paper added, "it is dubious to assert in the 21st century that the good queen who authorized the expulsion of the Jews and the creation of the Inquisition constitutes a paradigm of tolerance and charity."

The bishops' recommendation also was condemned in the independence-minded Basque region. Although Basques are among the most devout and church-going Catholics in the country, many see their history as one of oppression by Spanish kings and dictators.

Martin Garitano, a columnist for the Gara daily in the Basque city of San Sebastian, said "Catholics should be scandalized" at the prospect of a saint who built a country on an edifice of religious persecution. □

Russian region a 'tolerance model'

MOSCOW (JTA) — A predominantly Muslim region of Russia is a model of religious tolerance, the U.S. ambassador to Russia said.

Alexander Vershbow made the comments during a visit to the city of Kazan in Tatarstan last week after meeting with the leaders of the local Jewish, Muslim and Russian Orthodox communities. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

French Jews are mostly mum after controversial Peres visit

By Andrew Diamond

PARIS (JTA) — Given the spate of anti-Jewish attacks linked to the Palestinian intifada, French Jewish leaders were surprisingly quiet about Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres' comments on a recent visit here.

For months, French Jews have tried to draw attention to a wave of anti-Semitic aggression that began with the start of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000, and which many feel has reached epidemic proportions.

With presidential elections approaching in April, French Jewish leaders have criticized both leading candidates for downplaying the seriousness of the anti-Semitic incidents.

The situation recently drew the attention of Israeli officials.

Last month, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced that he was "very worried" about the dangerous wave of French anti-Semitism.

In mid-January, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Melchior told the French daily *Le Monde* that "France is the worst Western country" when it comes to anti-Semitism.

This was accompanied by an announcement from Israel's Absorption Ministry that it was offering financial inducements to French Jews wanting to immigrate to Israel.

Given this backdrop, many French Jews had anticipated that Peres would use his diplomatic visit with French President Jacques Chirac to place French anti-Semitism on the table.

What was hardly expected, however, was that Peres would support yet another repudiation of the problem by the French head of state.

Faced with Chirac's statement that he was "shocked and hurt" by Sharon's remarks and Chirac's assertion that "there was no upsurge of anti-Semitism in France," Peres told reporters, "I am certain that France is not anti-Semitic, neither historically nor currently."

In addition, Peres said, the "French leadership is staging a serious and determined battle against anti-Semitism in France."

This last comment drew sharp criticism from one of those on the front lines of the battle against French anti-Semitism.

Shimon Samuels, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Paris office, which documented 320 anti-Semitic incidents in France last year, claimed that "Peres' appeasement encouraged the denial of Jew-hatred in France and weakened strident protests by organizations such as ours at a time when synagogues are burning and Jewish schoolchildren are under attack."

"We get calls daily from frightened Jews who cannot get attention from either the police or the politicians," Samuels told the *Jerusalem Post*.

Roger Cukierman, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations, took a more conciliatory tone.

"I can agree that the French government is not anti-Semitic, even though there are many anti-Jewish activities in France," he said. "But in any case, of course France has a history of anti-Semitism, including the Dreyfus case and Vichy."

Overall, the French Jewish reaction to Peres's remarks has been somewhat muted.

The comments of both Samuels and Cukierman appeared not in the French Jewish press but in Israeli newspapers. The militant

French Jewish Web sites, Antisem.com and Desinfos.com, did not run any editorial response to the Peres visit. Some of this has to do with the mounting violence in Israel, which has diverted attention from the problem of domestic anti-Semitism.

In addition, after a series of high-profile acts of anti-Semitic violence at the end of last year and the start of 2002, there was a lull in such incidents during February.

While many would sharply disagree with Peres's vote of confidence in the French government's efforts, community leaders still appear reluctant to voice the idea that anti-Semitism in France is a widespread social problem rather than a phenomenon mainly confined to communities where Sephardic Jews and Maghrebins — Arabs of North African descent — live side by side.

In a recent demonstration of some 1,000 Jews in the Paris suburb of Creteil, for example, the president of the Paris Consistoire, Moise Cohen, opened his speech with the assertion, "France is not an anti-Semitic country."

Minutes later, the grand rabbi of Paris, David Messas, echoed these comments, stating, "This is why we are here today, to respond in front of the republic that we love."

"We are democrats," he continued, "because we're French and because we're Jewish."

At this and two other demonstrations in January against anti-Semitic violence, Jewish leaders took great pains to present the Jewish community as an integral part of the French republic.

But as anti-Semitism becomes a pervasive force in the everyday lives of more and more Jews, there are indications that the community may be starting to outpace its leadership in its response to the problem.

Even among Jews who appear to be the most integrated — native-born youths of Sephardic origins currently attending public universities — perspectives on French anti-Semitism are becoming much more pointed.

Jewish students taking a study break in the cafeteria of the National Library were eager to talk about their experiences with anti-Semitism.

Rebecca Marciano, a student at Assas, one of France's most prestigious schools for law and finance, spoke of the tensions between Jewish students and members of a longstanding neo-Nazi organization at her school.

"The administration of the school knows all about the group," she said, "but nothing has ever been done about it, even when there were some fights last year."

Marciano and her boyfriend, Jonathan Elmaleh, a student in computer science at the University of Paris 12, both said they look forward to immigrating to Israel, a decision influenced by the present conditions of anti-Jewish aggression.

"Many of our friends feel the same way," Elmaleh said.

Living with their families in Creteil, the site of a recent arson attack on a Jewish school, they have experienced firsthand the "new face of anti-Semitism": violence by Arab youths against their Jewish neighbors.

"There are incidents every day that are never reported," said Elmaleh, who volunteers each weekend to provide security for Jews walking to and from synagogue.

They also have encountered anti-Semitism in the French educational system, they say, which gives them little faith that the French government will protect their rights.

"In addition to Arab anti-Semitism," Marciano said, "there is kind of an aristocratic anti-Semitism in France.

"This might be the more worrisome kind," she added. □