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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli soldier killed in Gaza

An Israeli soldier was killed in a gun battle with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday.

Sgt. Kivan Cohen, 19, of Petach Tikva, was shot by Palestinian gunmen in the southern Gaza Strip.

He died of his injuries en route to the hospital. Palestinians said a 15-year-old Palestinian also was killed in the gunfight.

Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said the violence threatened the agreement for a gradual cease-fire reached Sunday, under which Palestinian forces would be responsible for maintaining security in the Gaza Strip.

In the West Bank, an armed Palestinian was killed and another was injured in an exchange of fire in the Tulkarm refugee camp. Israeli security forces detained 15 Palestinians during searches in the camp.

Israel, U.S. blamed for takeover

Iraq blamed Israel and the United States after dissidents temporarily took over the Iraqi Embassy in Germany.

"Armed mercenaries of the American and Zionist intelligence services attacked our embassy in Berlin," the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said Tuesday in a statement.

Several members of an Iraqi dissident group called the Democratic Iraqi Opposition of Germany were taken into custody when German police stormed the embassy after the group had held employees hostage inside the building for several hours.

Flood damage closes Prague shul

Prague's Pinkas Synagogue will be closed for several months after sustaining serious damage in last week's floods.

Jewish Museum director Leo Pavlat said inspections showed damage to the synagogue's foundations as a result of water seeping through underground channels.

Specialists have informed the museum that many of the 80,000 names of Czech Holocaust victims hand-painted on the synagogue's walls have been damaged.

Barak testifies before riot panel

The commission probing the Israeli Arab riots of October 2000 has concluded its public hearings with testimony from former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli officials welcome P.R. plan, but differ on need to discredit Arafat

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials are notoriously loath to learn from outsiders — but they have been deeply impressed by an American study of Israel's public relations needs in the United States, and say they intend to carry out most of its recommendations.

Among them: Be less confrontational and more hopeful in television appearances; don't trash Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat or the Palestinian people; and, whenever possible, stress Israel's desire for peace, its vibrant democracy and the values it shares with America.

Steven Cohen, a professor at the Melton Centre at Hebrew University, puts the strategy this way: "When you're speaking for Israel, say the word 'peace' four times, like the other side says 'occupation' four times."

The study is part of the Israel P.R. Project led by Democratic Party consultant Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, with polling and analysis by Democratic consultant Stanley Greenberg and Republican strategist Frank Luntz.

Mizrahi and Greenberg came to Israel in late July to present their findings, and were followed two weeks later by Luntz.

All three met officials in the Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Ministry and the Army Spokesman's Office — and all three, officials say, made a powerful impression.

"I have been working in this job for two years now and I say this is a huge contribution, because it gives us a quality of feedback we have never had before," says Gidon Meir, the deputy director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry. "It will enable us to build a more professional campaign."

Until now, Israeli P.R. has not been able to afford the professionals who could give it this kind of advice, Meir said.

His annual public relations budget at the Foreign Ministry is only \$9 million, and last year he turned down an offer for similar research because he simply could not afford the \$1.2 million cost, Meir said. Already, Meir said, his ministry is reshaping the way it packages Israeli government policies to the media.

"We are discussing the suffering of the Palestinians, the shared values of democracy, the fight against terror," Meir said. "And we are always emphasizing the light at the end of the tunnel. Even after a major terror attack, we are asking, 'Are the Palestinians better off now than they were two years ago?'" before the intifada began?

Meir agrees with most of the consultants' recommendations — but not all.

"If we talk terror, terror, terror all the time, and don't add hope at the end, maybe we are missing the mark," he says. "We must tell the Americans that we and the Palestinians are suffering because they don't want peace. If they did, we would welcome them with open arms, as we did Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Jordan's King Hussein."

But Israeli officials balk at stopping their negative campaign against Arafat. They point out that discrediting Arafat is not just a P.R. gambit, but a central element of Israeli policy.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, they say, really believes that as long as Arafat is around there is no chance of peace with the Palestinians, and that Israel's biggest foreign policy success since the intifada began two years ago has been convincing the Bush administration that Arafat must go. The foundation for the change in administra-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians patrol Bethlehem

Palestinian security forces patrolled Bethlehem on Tuesday following the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

The police patrolled near the Church of the Nativity as an Israeli army curfew was lifted and Israeli troops withdrew to positions outside the West Bank city.

The withdrawal was carried out Monday night in accordance with an agreement reached between Israeli and Palestinian Authority officials for a gradual cease-fire beginning with Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, Palestinian police forces checked Palestinian drivers' papers and vehicles on roads leading to Israeli settlements, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. Israel said it is waiting for action by Palestinian security forces against shooting and mortar attacks in Gaza before it will ease conditions there.

Israel kills brother of PFLP leader

Israeli soldiers killed the brother of the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Mohammed Sa'adat reportedly was killed Tuesday after he fired on the soldiers, who were trying to arrest him in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Sa'adat's brother, Ahmed, is the leader of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

He is currently in a Palestinian jail for planning the assassination of Israeli Cabinet minister Rehavam Ze'evi last October.

Alleged informer detained

Palestinian police arrested a Palestinian who allegedly provided Israel with information that led to the recent assassination of Hamas' military commander in the Gaza Strip.

A senior Palestinian Authority official said the suspect, a 22-year-old student from Rafiah, had been detained two weeks ago, Israel Radio reported.



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tion policy was laid by a P.R. effort launched last December, Meir says, followed up by a file on Arafat put together by Cabinet minister Dan Naveh.

It was sealed by the revelation of Arafat's involvement in the Karine-A arms smuggling affair in January and the documents found by Israeli intelligence in Arafat's Ramallah headquarters in April, implicating him directly in financing terrorist groups.

But as the Palestinians desperately try to revive Arafat's fortunes, Israel must continue explaining why he must be replaced and Palestinian institutions reformed to allow a genuine peace process, officials say.

Indeed, Sharon's P.R. people claim that Labor Party leaders such as Foreign Minister Shimon Peres — and the latest leadership hopeful, Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna — who indicate that they would talk to Arafat are undermining this policy at a critical time, when only a few more weeks or months are needed for its final success.

The Arafat issue aside, the key problem in Israeli hasbarah, or public relations, has been its narrative of peacemakers fighting terrorists against the Palestinian narrative of freedom fighters opposing occupiers.

That has led to Israel's emphasis on the nihilistic and immoral nature of Palestinian terror and the duplicity of the Palestinian leadership.

In many focus groups, however, this leads to a kind of "moral equivalence," a blurred perception of violence and suffering on both sides and an inability to distinguish between them, the American group says: Both sides are seen as aggressors, both as victims, both as having justified claims.

The insight that most impressed the Israelis, Meir says, is that to break this P.R. deadlock, Israel should stress the uniqueness of its relationship with the American people. That is what will make Israel, rather than the Palestinians, special in the collective American consciousness.

Despite Meir's enthusiasm, the plan was received less warmly in Sharon's office.

Sharon spokesman Ra'anah Gissin called polls "subjects of some circumspection," and compared public relations to "cosmetics."

"In order to have good hasbarah, Israel has to stand by its birthright. We failed because we neglected to explain that Jews have a birthright to live here, not just a security need," Gissin told JTA. "But our neighbors haven't recognized our right to live here."

Ironically, Luntz says the historical message is precisely one that Israel should play down. In tests where viewers used a dial to indicate their reactions to a television advertisement, the needle sank upon mention of the Jews' ancient connection to the Land of Israel.

That's because it makes viewers think the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a timeless blood feud that will never be resolved, Luntz said. When the ad stressed Israel's multiculturalism and democracy, response ratings shot up.

Privately, several sources said Gissin's confrontational media appearances were singled out for criticism, with Cohen saying Gissin has been described as "bellicose."

Gissin doubted that all Israeli spokespeople would accept the new P.R. directive.

"Israel is a democracy, a complex political system, and you can't organize your P.R. like in other types of regimes — you can't speak in one voice," he said.

But Meir, who is responsible for public relations in the Foreign Ministry and often appears on camera to give Israel's perspective, said he intends to implement the American strategy. "I asked Frank Luntz to take all his findings and summarize them on a page or two, and we will distribute them to all our spokespeople," he said.

The coming weeks and months will tell if it makes any difference. □

JTA Staff Writer Joe Berkofsky in New York contributed to this report.

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

U.S. officers tour Israel

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. law enforcement officers are touring Israel.

As part of their trip, the officers are meeting with bomb and forensic experts and touring the sites of Palestinian terror attacks.

The trip is the latest example of increasing anti-terrorism cooperation between the two countries since the Sept. 11 attacks. □

JEWISH WORLD

Sept. 11 liturgy produced

College students seeking to remember Sept. 11 victims can find inspiration in the words of a rabbi burned to death for teaching the Torah.

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life has published a booklet, "For the Parchments May Burn, but the Letters are Flying Free," after the phrase Rabbi Chanina Ben Traydon uttered in the year 135 C.E. as the Romans wrapped him in a Torah scroll and set him on fire.

The booklet, which can also be used for other services honoring victims of terrorism, includes prayers drawn from ancient Jewish texts, biographies of Sept. 11 terror victims by The New York Times, poetry, patriotic songs and traditional Jewish liturgy.

Neo-Nazis to rock against Israel

A white supremacist group is planning a large anti-Israel rally in Washington.

The neo-Nazi National Alliance is planning a large demonstration and a "Rock Against Israel" white-power music concert Saturday outside the U.S. Capitol.

Hundreds are expected at the event, and a counterdemonstration by anti-racist skinheads and others is planned as well.

Student activists head to camp

Hundreds of pro-Israel college activists are participating in a conference in Pennsylvania this week.

More than 440 college activists from around the world are convening at Hillel's Charles Schusterman International Student Leaders Assembly for a six-day conference to learn leadership skills and pro-Israel advocacy.

Comic character is Jewish

A Marvel Comics superhero revealed his Jewish roots. In a recent issue of the "Fantastic Four," Benjamin "The Thing" Grimm returned to his Lower East Side neighborhood to return a Jewish star he stole from a Jewish shopkeeper.

After The Thing recites the Shema, the shopkeeper asks him whether he had been ashamed of his Jewishness all these years. "I don't talk it up, is all," The Thing says. "Figure there's enough trouble in this world without people thinkin' Jews are all monsters like me."

The creators of the character — who themselves are Jewish — pegged The Thing as a Jew when they created him in 1961, according to a Marvel Comics spokesperson.

In the final panels of the comic book, a villain tells The Thing — who is orange and rock-like — that he does not look Jewish.

It's a confusing world out there: Guides map church-state issues

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — What's old is new again.

The church-state issue, long of primary concern to the Jewish community, has flared up again, with liberal Jewish groups worried that recent Supreme Court decisions are breaching the constitutional wall between church and state.

"If we cannot achieve the results we want in court, then we must wage an educational campaign — that is winnable — for the hearts and minds of teachers and administrators on the need to accommodate differing views and be attentive to the impact on religious minorities," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

With the law evolving, several Jewish groups are offering guidance on religion in the public schools.

The American Jewish Committee's "Religion in the Public Schools: A Primer for Students, Parents, Teachers, and School Administrators" outlines what religious activities are permissible under current U.S. law and which constitute an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

"Where appropriate, schools should accommodate the religious practices of individual students," the AJCommittee guide says.

But the guide tries to explain both sides of the issue: "In the classroom, children are a captive audience and the younger the child, the less likely he or she will be able to draw distinctions between school endorsement and neutral academic instruction."

Local AJCommittee chapters will make the guide available to school districts across the country.

Changes in the law prompted the new guide, said Jeffrey Sinensky, legal counsel and director of domestic policy for the AJCommittee.

Last year, the Supreme Court ruled that a Christian youth club had the right to meet in a public school building after school hours.

This year, the Supreme Court ruled that an Ohio program allowing the use of vouchers for private and parochial schools was constitutional.

Cases regarding prayer at school graduations continue to make their way through the courts.

Orthodox Jewish groups want to lower the wall that separates church and state, as long as minority religions are protected.

For its part, the American Jewish Congress updates on a semiannual basis its "Religion and the Public Schools: A Summary of the Law," a detailed examination of Supreme Court church-state decisions and other court cases, and their implications for public schools.

The guide addresses issues such as vocal prayer and Bible reading, silent prayer and student religious clubs.

Some school districts use the guides for staff training, some lawyers for school districts find the guides helpful, and parents say the guides help facilitate dialogue with schools when practices are called into question, according to Marc Stern, the co-director of the AJCongress' legal department.

The Department of Education issues its own guidelines regarding religious expression in public schools.

The government's guidelines, updated in 1998, address such issues as official neutrality regarding religious activity, teaching of religion and religious literature.

The National Parent Teacher Association and the National Association of Elementary School Principals joined with education, religious and civil rights groups, including AJCongress, to issue its own guide in 1999.

But even with increased attention on church-state issues now, the top priorities for schools are different, said June Million, a spokeswoman for the principals group.

"Right now schools are worried about test scores and accountability," Million said, referring to the top objectives of the Bush administration's education plan. "It's hard for them to focus on other issues." □

Questioned by riot panel, Barak says he didn't misread Arab sector

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The commission probing the Israeli Arab riots of October 2000 has concluded its public hearings with testimony from former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Barak is the most senior of 14 Israeli officials to receive letters from the commission warning that the panel's conclusions might be used against them.

On Tuesday, he became the last of more than 430 people called to testify during the public hearings.

Barak denied claims that he failed to accurately read the mood in the Arab sector and adequately prepare police for a potential outbreak of violence. Instead, he accused Israeli Arab politicians of inciting the crowd to violence.

Following the conclusion of Barak's testimony, the panel will begin reviewing the material it has gathered and drawing its recommendations.

Barak himself ordered the creation of the Orr Commission after Israeli Arab leaders rejected his initial proposal for a public panel to investigate the events, in which 13 Israeli Arabs were killed by police fire during several days of rioting.

Some previous sessions were marred when victims' relatives attacked police officials who were testifying. This prompted the commission to install security measures, including a closed-circuit viewing system and a physical barrier between observers and those testifying.

In the letter he received from the commission, Barak was warned on five points:

- that he failed to adequately prepare police for the potential violence;
- that he instructed police to reopen major roads in northern Israel using "any means" necessary, regardless of the risk;
- that he did not take steps to calm the situation during the first two days of rioting;
- that he did not request updates on civilian casualties; and
- that he did not insist on orderly documentation of his directives.

During Tuesday's hearing, Barak rejected claims that he failed to assess how the nascent Palestinian intifada in the West Bank and Gaza Strip could spill over into Israel's Arab sector.

Days after Palestinian violence began in late September 2000, Israeli Arabs rioted, closing off major highways, dragging Jewish drivers from their cars and beating them, chanting "Slaughter the Jews" and burning and destroying property.

Thirteen Arabs were killed in clashes with police. The Arab public and leaders criticized the decision to use force against the rioters. Barak said he had given thought to developments in the Israeli Arab public that underlay the protests. An evaluation of the situation was made on Sept. 29, 2000, just after the Palestinian intifada began, he said.

Barak said he was aware that the intifada might reverberate within the Israeli Arab public, but he said there had been no professional assessment of the potential scope of such a development.

"I was aware that there could be concern for an outbreak of riots of the kind I was already familiar with, like Land Day," he

said, referring to Israeli Arab commemoration of a 1976 incident in which protesters also were killed by police.

Before the October 2000 riots broke out, however, "there was no intelligence assessment or specific assessment that we were on the verge of something we never saw before," he said.

Barak blamed a "separatist Arab group with nationalist political demands" for the violence.

Among others, he named the National Democratic Alliance headed by Knesset member Azmi Bishara, the Bnei Kfar movement and the Islamic Movement.

The Arab leaders have fought any attempt to investigate their alleged incitement to violence, saying the commission must only investigate the police and Israeli officials.

Barak also said that a report about Arab society being on the verge of "explosion" was not unique to that sector, saying similar warnings had been issued about relations between religious and secular and rich and poor in Israel.

Barak rejected claims he instructed police to use "any means" to reopen the major roads, saying it contradicted his policy that every effort be made to restore calm.

Regarding his use of those terms in a radio interview on Oct. 2, 2000, Barak said, "No police officer gets his orders from the prime minister on the radio."

Barak also denied involvement in the decision to use police snipers or rubber bullets against rioters.

He said he first learned that snipers had been used from then-Cabinet minister Yuli Tamir, who raised the issue a week later during a Cabinet meeting.

Even before becoming prime minister, Barak said, he was aware of some of the grave problems in the Arab sector and the socioeconomic gaps between the Israel's Jewish and Arab populations.

Barak said he worked to address those issues, but that they were not the only matters on his agenda at the time. □

S. African Jews fight AIDS

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — South Africa's Jewish Board of Deputies has joined the fight against HIV/AIDS, which affects an estimated 20 percent of the country's 45 million population.

"It's a fight that needs to be won," national chairman Russell Gaddin said Aug. 14, when a senior delegation from the board met with the Treatment Action Campaign in Cape Town.

The campaign is led by Muslim AIDS activist and former anti-apartheid campaigner Zackie Achmat and national TAC manager Nathan Geffen, who is Jewish.

"For Jews, life is the most precious thing. One can break virtually every religious law to save lives," Gaddin said. Treatment and medication "should be a given. We should not need to plead for the cause."

Vivienne Anstey, a regional leader of the board, said the Jewish community could look into assisting on three levels: motivating financial support, utilizing business connections within the Jewish community and helping to mobilize skills and resources within the community.

The visit from the board was inspired by Achmat, who is HIV-positive and has refused to take his prescribed medication until the South African government reverses its stance on withholding the drugs from patients in public hospitals. □