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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Powell warns both sides

Secretary of State Colin Powell warned Israel and the Palestinian Authority not to let violence contaminate the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Powell made his comments in Madrid on Thursday at the start of a three-day trip that will include the Middle East.

10 Palestinians killed in clashes

At least 10 Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli troops that took place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the Gaza Strip, at least eight Palestinians, including a toddler, were killed and seven Israeli soldiers wounded during a large-scale military incursion that began Wednesday night.

In the West Bank, two armed Palestinians were killed in a clash with Israeli troops.

Tisch heads conference

James Tisch was elected chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The Presidents Conference on Wednesday approved Tisch, chairman of the board of the United Jewish Communities, as chairman, without dissent. The nominating committee had chosen Tisch in March to chair the group.

He will begin a term of at least one year on June 1, replacing Mortimer Zuckerman.

HIAS: Immigrant rights dying

Recent rulings from the Supreme Court and the Justice Department have eroded immigrant rights to an unprecedented degree, the immigrant welfare group HIAS says.

This week, the high court ruled the government can jail immigrants awaiting deportation without allowing them a chance to show they are not a danger to the community or a flight risk.

Last week, Attorney General John Ashcroft said foreign nationals could be detained indefinitely if it's believed they could endanger national security.

"No one denies that 9/11 changed our world," HIAS President Leonard Glickman said, "but the 180-degree policy turns regarding immigrants are too much and will inevitably harm our legacy as a land of hope and opportunity."

ISRAEL TURNS 55

With Independence Day nearing, are U.S. Jews connected to Israel?

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Delight shot through the classroom of eighth-graders like a pogo stick gone wild.

The 35 students at the Heschel School on Manhattan's Upper West Side erupted Monday afternoon with giddy comments and questions about the two-week trip to Israel they were about to begin the next morning.

"I'm ecstatic," shouted David Inkeles, 13. "It's very rare to get to go with all your friends to the desert in Israel for two weeks."

One boy asked if he should bring his own toilet paper.

"Israeli toilet paper scratches, so if you're cool with that, that's great," the teacher answered.

Elliot Sion, 14, said, "I feel sort of like we're messengers for the rest of the country," bringing American Jews' support to their brethren in Israel.

"The fact that we have our own Jewish homeland," said Yoni Bokser, 14, "gives me a safe feeling."

Such visceral connectedness to Israel is not so common among American Jews, a majority of whom — from 60 percent to 75 percent, according to estimates — have never visited the Jewish state.

However, American Jewish interest in Israel has soared over the last two years, as worry for the embattled state has joined with a new sense of vulnerability after Sept. 11.

American Jews' level of attachment to Israel is as great as he has seen in his seventeen years as head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said Malcolm Hoenlein, with "standing-room-only" crowds for his speaking engagements around the country.

However, as Israel Independence Day approaches on May 7, other Jewish leaders are voicing concern about the relationship between American Jews and Israel.

For one, the protracted Palestinian intifada, now in its 31st month, could have damaging effects. The drop in American travel to Israel since the intifada began — a fall of 60 percent, almost all of which is assumed to be Jewish, according to Israel's Tourism Ministry — has lessened American Jews' physical connection to the land.

In addition, an emphasis on security diverts American Jews from other critical issues in Israel, observers say.

The continued violence also might be emotionally overwhelming for American Jews, causing them to detach from the issue entirely.

Others say the Jewish educational system has failed to make Israel a focus.

And some say American Jews have internalized the American trend toward an individual connection to God over a communal one, chipping away at the Jewish philosophy of peoplehood — a vital component of attachment to the Jewish state.

"There's a wide diversity of attachment to Israel" among American Jews, which is related to the number of times one has visited Israel and the strength of one's Jewish identity, said Steven M. Cohen, a demographer of American Jewry.

"The most engaged" — about 20 percent of American Jews — "are the most attached," Cohen said. Another 40 percent represent "the vast Jewish middle," who care about Israel but are not well-informed, he said. The remaining 40 percent are unconcerned with either Judaism or Israel, Cohen said.

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA/World

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barghouti deputy convicted

An Israeli court convicted a senior Fatah member in the terrorist murder of Israelis.

Nasser Awis, who was the deputy of West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, was found guilty Thursday of involvement in a series of terrorist attacks in which 14 Israelis were killed.

Like Barghouti, who also is being tried by Israel, Awis refused to defend himself, saying he did not recognize Israel's right to try him.

Students, soccer team stranded

Israel's national soccer team was stranded abroad because of the general strike at home. The team was unable to fly home after its 2-0 victory over Cyprus.

The Histadrut said it would make special arrangements to allow President Moshe Katsav and some 2,000 Israeli students, who were in Poland this week for the March of the Living, to return to Israel. The strike was called to protest the treasury's economic austerity plan, which passed a first reading in the Knesset on Wednesday night.

Jerusalem must fund gay event

The city of Jerusalem must help fund a Gay Pride event, Israel's Supreme Court ruled. Judge Mishael Cheshin ruled Sunday that it is "inconceivable that the municipality would fund religious events but not pride events." The parade is slated for June 13.

Beggars asked to vacate wall

Israel is trying to crack down on panhandling at the Western Wall.

New signs posted at the wall in Jerusalem ask people not to solicit donations. In recent years the wall has become a haven for beggars, some of whom give out bracelets to ward off the evil eye in exchange for donations.



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Union, said the intifada has led to a short-term lift in support for Israel.

However, ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence is "depressing their physical involvement with Israel, and it's taxing their emotional energies in identifying with Israel," he said.

"I think many Jews have already checked out. They've said something like 'a plague on both your houses'; this is all too complicated for me," Hirsch said.

Hirsch's own group used to send more than 1,000 adults on tours to Israel every year — but has sent hardly anyone since the intifada began.

That's not the only toll the violence has taken.

According to Cohen, the intifada has eclipsed other areas where American Jews could advance their relationship with Israel.

"I think American Jews are overly, and understandably, focused on matters of vulnerability and are failing to engage more broadly with all that Israel has to offer religiously, spiritually, politically and culturally," he said. "I'm concerned that the focus on vulnerability is both thin and short-lasting."

Cohen lamented what he sees as the lack of vigorous debate among American Jews about Israel's social and political ills.

"We run all these missions to teach people how to be advocates about Israel," he said.

"But we don't hold seminars or discussion groups so that Jews can feel comfortable expressing their concerns, their anxieties, their doubts in a friendly environment."

The result, Cohen said, is a much less sophisticated and less committed American Jewry.

Furthermore, he said, that lack "may be creating a disjuncture that will eventually break." Hoenlein, on the other hand, said the issues that once divided American Jews about Israel are not on the table today.

"There are today clearly consensus issues around which people are uniting," he said, listing the war on terrorism as an example.

"If the 'road map' and the peace process moves ahead, there will be divisions in the community over some of these issues."

Hoenlein also noted other ways American Jews have displayed support for Israel, such as buying Israeli products and raising vast sums of money for the Jewish state in fund-raising campaigns.

Jewish communal leaders agree that an emphasis on Israel in Jewish education is key to improving the connection between American Jews and the Jewish state.

"It hasn't really gotten into the core and the soul of Jewish education," said Barry Chazan, international education director for Birthright Israel, which sends young Jews on trips to the Jewish state.

But recent conferences on the topic have sparked a "re-engineering" of the educational system in Jewish federations, he noted.

Hoenlein, who agreed that education about Israel was lacking, noted that anti-Israel activity on college campuses has spawned counter-efforts by Jewish organizations to educate students about Israel.

Encouraging American Jews to visit Israel should be a chief concern of the community, since visiting the country creates a stronger Jewish community, Chazan said.

"To not know Israel is to be deprived as an American Jew, to be deprived of a critical component of our Judaism," Hirsch agreed. "The collective existence of the Jewish people is organic in the promised land."

In addition, he noted, Israel "provides a national home for five million of our people who would either have been dispersed, killed or oppressed without Israel."

That's a sentiment that Thomas Fryth, 77, a resident at the Jewish Home and Hospital of New York, understands well.

Israel is "our life. It's our homeland. It's our place to go," he said, adding that he would like to die there.

Fryth's friend Sam Kelberman, 81, shares his attachment.

Kelberman remembered how he felt when Israel was created: It was "an opening and a possibility for survival," he said.

Today, amid the Palestinian intifada, Kelberman feels even "more attached" to the Jewish state "because of what they had to go through."

Israel, he said, is simply "the only way Judaism can persist." □

JEWISH WORLD

Synagogue disavows Arafat pal

A prominent New York synagogue disassociated itself from an awards ceremony it is hosting for an American Jewish supporter of Yasser Arafat.

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun said that a group called Jews for Racial and Economic Justice — not the synagogue itself, as the New York Sun reported — is honoring Adam Shapiro.

The synagogue's former rabbi, Marshall Meyer, founded JFREJ, so the congregation has hosted the annual event, a synagogue statement said. "However, B'nai Jeshurun has nothing to do with the selection of JFREJ's honorees, and JFREJ's choice of honorees in no way reflects the policy of" the synagogue, the statement said.

B'nai Jeshurun, a popular independent congregation on Manhattan's Upper West Side, is still due to host the June event honoring Shapiro, who remained inside the headquarters of Arafat during Israel's anti-terror offensive in the West Bank last year.

Faith groups urge Iraq teamwork

Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders called on the United States to relinquish its sole control over rebuilding Iraq.

A Chicago summit convened by members of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, the National Council of Churches and the Islamic Society of North America said the United States should "engage the cooperation of the international community" in rebuilding post-war Iraq, said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Washington-based group.

The United States would see its relations with the Muslim world suffer if it retained sole control over Iraq, Saperstein said.

Jesus invoked at rally

Supporters of an Alabama judge who wants to hang a Ten Commandments monument in the state's main judicial building rallied Thursday. One organizer of the event called for a crusade "to reclaim America for Jesus Christ." The American Jewish Committee and other groups have urged a federal appeals court to declare the monument unconstitutional.

Protests at Prague Jewish school

Students, teachers and parents from Prague's Jewish high school demonstrated outside the Jewish community's headquarters Wednesday in a dispute over the selection of a new school principal.

The demonstrators, who carried banners and shouted slogans calling for the acting principal of the Lauder school to remain in his post, said the city's Jewish leaders had imposed their own choice of principal and suggested that the selection process had not been handled fairly.

OBITUARY

John Kayston dies at age of 87, worked at JTA for nearly 50 years

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — John Kayston, a refugee from Hitler's Germany who worked his way up at JTA to executive vice president, died Saturday here of a heart attack at age 87.

"For 50 years, my dad was totally dedicated to JTA," said his daughter, Anita Rapp. "He would come home at unbelievable hours. He was on call 24 hours a day. He would come home and then come back on the A train to fix something."

In addition to his daughter, Kayston is survived by Ruth, his wife of 63 years, and two grandchildren.

Soon after Kayston left Germany, he was able to use his German language skills and some journalistic ingenuity to shed light on Nazi activities in the United States.

He went as an interpreter with Daniel Schorr, who later became a well-known correspondent for CBS and National Public Radio, among others, to cover the German-American Nazi Bund.

"The storm troopers at the door asked for our press I.D., and refused us entry when they saw we were from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency," he told JTA a few years ago.

"We went to another entrance and when showing our I.D. we covered the word 'Jewish' with our thumb."

They were let in.

Kayston was born in Saarbrücken, Germany, in 1915.

Before he left his native land in 1935, he was active in Jewish and Zionist youth groups.

He started his JTA career in April 1936 as a mail clerk and messenger. He held down a variety of positions until he became business manager in 1967.

During those years, he helped shepherd JTA out of difficult financial straits, said Robert Arnow, a past president of JTA.

"He was a calming influence" at JTA, Arnow said.

He was named general manager in 1970. In 1976, he was named executive vice president, responsible for JTA's administration and finance.

In the early 1980s, Kayston quit smoking.

As the rest of the office continued to smoke, he would chew on cigar after cigar — but not smoke them, said Mark Seal, who was then JTA's business manager and later became executive vice president.

"He had profound respect for anyone who had ever worked for JTA," Seal said.

Kayston held the position of executive vice president until he retired on Jan. 1, 1984. Since that time, he has served as executive vice president emeritus.

Kayston was a dedicated family man who had the chance to put those beliefs into practice. During his early years at JTA, he helped get his cousin and father — both refugees from Nazi Europe — jobs at the agency.

In 1966, he traveled to France to meet his sister, whom he had not seen in more than 30 years. She had gone into hiding during the war. It was a moving experience that he never forgot, his daughter recalled.

As part of that trip, he visited Israel for the first time. It was a country that played a part in his daily life at JTA, and he would often get aggravated while reading The New York Times over what he thought were anti-Israel slants to articles, Rapp said.

Even though he wasn't a native English speaker, he quickly adapted to the new language and became an expert and meticulous grammarian — traits even more important in the pre-computer days.

He was known to some as the "Walking Encyclopedia," a testament to his prodigious general knowledge — and his daughter would rely on him for homework questions in spelling, grammar and knowledge, she said.

Those questions were most often answered by phone from his JTA office, where she knew her father would be.

JTA "was really his life," she said. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

What's behind Blair's pressure on Israel? It's tough love, some say

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — As the long-delayed “road map” toward Israeli-Palestinian peace finally sees daylight, British Prime Minister Tony Blair may be inclined to take some credit for pushing the process forward.

Israeli officials don't think he deserves much.

Blair's frequent and vocal interventions in the past year have been “not at all helpful,” one Israeli source, who asked not to be named, told JTA.

“The closer the war with Iraq got, the more vigorous the United Kingdom's courting of the Islamic world got,” the source said.

“Some of it was pathetic,” the source said, citing Blair's promise last summer to get Israel and the Palestinians talking to each other “by the end of the year.”

“The Americans said: ‘What year?’” the source said.

“They would like to show that they are doing something. But people in Israel are saying, ‘This is a game for them. For us, it's our lives,’” the Israeli added.

Israel has publicly and sharply rebuked Blair, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and the British ambassador to Israel more than once since the beginning of the year. Dov Weisglass, a top adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, said remarks about the road map Blair made at the beginning of April were “inappropriate and unbalanced,” calling Britain's position “extreme.”

Israel was even angrier when, in March, Straw appeared to compare Israel's record at the United Nations to Iraq's.

Israel called the remarks “worrisome and outrageous,” and summoned Ambassador Sherard Cowper-Coles and criticized him.

“They do not contribute to the peace process, and might even hinder progress toward achieving a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict,” the director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry told Cowper-Coles.

Aware of Israel's irritation, Blair gave a long interview to the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* on the eve of Passover.

“I have great respect for what Israel has achieved and that is why I am so anxious that we create a situation in which Israel can feel real confidence and security and stability,” he told the newspaper, describing himself as “a real friend of Israel.”

The Israeli source concedes that point: “Blair, and Straw too, are friends of Israel. I understand their predicament.”

The predicament, another observer says, is that Blair heads a Labor party with a strong pro-Palestinian wing.

“In the 1980s, Israel was an issue of totemic significance for the Labor left,” said Matthew Harris, a spokesman for the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel, a lobbying group. “They saw it as being central to all the problems of the Middle East — which it is not.

“And they still have in the back of their minds an obsession with Israel,” Harris said of the Labor rank and file, many of whom opposed Blair on the Iraq war. “He has to toss them a bone because they didn't drag him down” over Iraq, Harris said.

Stuart Polak, director of Conservative Friends of Israel, agreed.

Blair urged President Bush to make statements in praise of the road map to “save his own skin,” Polak said, “which is astounding when you look at” Labor's huge majority in the British Parliament.

A record proportion of Blair's own party voted against him on the Iraq war, but the government motion to go to war still passed easily, with support from much of the governing Labor and the opposition Conservative parties.

Only the small, centrist Liberal Democrat grouping took a party-line position against the war.

Amid the criticism, Blair has found unexpected defenders.

Malcolm Rifkind, a Conservative former foreign secretary and defense secretary — and a Jew with family in Israel — is among them.

“The British audience is puzzled that there is so much difficulty in recognizing that” the Israel-Palestinian conflict “has been the defining issue for most of the people in the region in the last 50 years,” Rifkind told JTA.

If some criticize the United States for lacking Blair's enthusiasm for the road map, it's because they recognize “that it is the only country outside the region that has any influence,” Rifkind said.

David Mencer, who as director of Labor Friends of Israel is close to the government, said Blair sees Israeli-Arab peace as an important goal.

“He believes in processes and getting people talking,” Mencer said, pointing to Blair's progress in the Northern Ireland conflict.

After 30 years of stalemate and bloodshed in Northern Ireland, Blair achieved a breakthrough because he kept negotiations going “no matter how odious the partners were,” Mencer said.

Blair compares himself to President Clinton, believing that his pro-Israel credentials are so strong he can push Israel toward uncomfortable compromises, Mencer said.

“He considers himself the most pro-Israel politician in Europe, which he is,” Mencer said. “He has never criticized Israel for taking action against terrorism. His only question is, ‘Where is this going?’”

Blair also thinks the time is right for a paradigm shift in the Middle East, Mencer says.

“As in the last Gulf conflict, there is some momentum created and a hope we can get everything sorted out at once,” he said.

Blair thinks he already has made a positive contribution by pushing for the appointment of a prime minister in the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Parliament's confirmation of Mahmoud Abbas this week overcame the final obstacle to releasing the road map.

But the Israeli source refuses to give Blair credit for that.

“The U.K. was not at all helpful in getting a prime minister appointed,” the source said. “Not even the last compromise. That was the Egyptians.” □

Yad Vashem transforms at 50

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's major Holocaust museum is expanding as it marks its 50th anniversary.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem will triple its size with a new complex slated to open in September 2004.

The complex, most of which will be underground, will narrate the Holocaust from a personal perspective with objects and stories.

The museum is also expanding its educational activities, aiming to bring every Israeli student to a full day seminar at its International School for Holocaust Studies. Offsite educational programs will include traveling educational exhibitions, Internet courses for educators, training sessions for teachers in Israel and abroad, and expanded partnerships with Holocaust institutions. □