

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel dismantles outposts

Israel began dismantling some illegal outposts in the West Bank, in line with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's pledge at last week's summit in Aqaba.

The moves came after a top Israeli defense official presented settler leaders with a list of some 15 enclaves, four of them populated, Israel Radio reported.

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo called the move an act of "deception" to legitimize settlements built during Sharon's term in office. A settler leader pledged to add more settlements.

Terrorist's house demolished

Israeli troops demolished the home Monday of one of the terrorists who attacked an army base in the Gaza Strip. Four Israeli soldiers were killed and four others were wounded in Sunday's attack near the Erez Crossing.

Greater overseas giving urged

The board of trustees of the United Jewish Communities voted to recommend that federations voluntarily increase their overseas allocations. The resolution, passed Monday at the group's meeting in Washington, suggests that federations use all the funds they will save as a result of a 9.5 percent reduction in UJC dues.

The dues reduction was part of a \$38.3 million budget that was approved later the same day by the UJC's Delegate Assembly.

Some questioned whether local federations would choose to follow the recommendation, given that they have ignored similar suggestions in the past and that federations have already determined their budgets for 2003-2004.

UJC chief outlines vision

Stephen Hoffman, CEO of the United Jewish Communities, outlined his vision for the future of UJC to the group's board of trustees.

He listed three "areas of focus" for UJC: to serve as a vehicle for "global Jewish responsibility," to develop new and innovative ideas and to strengthen local federations. The goals, he said Monday, were arrived at after the UJC worked with outside consultants to survey professional and lay leaders about their views of the federation system.

Chicago Tribune's apology ends cartoon controversy

By Cindy Sher

CHICAGO (JTA) — Ten days after a provocative editorial cartoon ran in the Chicago Tribune, the newspaper apologized, saying it had "failed to recognize that the cartoon conveyed symbols and stereotypes that slur the Jewish people and that are offensive."

"The editors of this newspaper regret publishing the cartoon," Sunday's editorial said.

Local Jewish leaders said the editorial was a positive step and had gone a long way in responding to their concerns.

The apology capped a week and a half of attention to a May 30 cartoon that incensed the local Jewish community, then made its way around the country on the Internet and drew considerable national media attention.

The cartoon by Dick Locher, a cartoonist syndicated through Tribune Media Services, depicts a hook-nosed grotesque figure — presumably Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — with a Star of David on his jacket. The looming figure stands before a chasm labeled "Mideast Gulch."

A kneeling figure, presumably President Bush, is carefully laying dollar bills across the bridge.

The Sharon figure stares at the money and says, "On second thought, the pathway to peace is looking a bit brighter."

On the other end of the path, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat waits with arms crossed.

The cartoon's erroneous message, according to critics, is that Israel's motivation for peace is triggered not by a desire to end the bloodshed of recent years but by American dollars.

Sunday's editorial in the Tribune ran alongside a letter by Lester Rosenberg, chairman of the board of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, decrying the cartoon and requesting an apology from the paper.

The cartoon struck a chord that lingered in the Jewish community because the Tribune didn't initially recognize the dangerous nature of the cartoon, according to Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Jewish United Fund.

"The cartoon exemplifies a trend" that editors at the Tribune apparently were not aware of, he said. "That is, the emergence of what is being labeled a new anti-Semitism, where the iconography of anti-Semitic stereotyping and the bigotry that goes with it have passed from the Nazis to sectors in the Arab world and now are leeching their way into the West as well — an anti-Semitism which attaches those images and attitudes to the treatment of Israel."

Rabbi Michael Siegel, the spiritual leader of Chicago's Anshe Emet Synagogue, who had convened a demonstration in front of the Tribune Tower on June 4, called the editorial a positive step.

In contrast to an initial Tribune editorial that responded to the outcry, Sunday's editorial "acknowledged the anti-Semitic nature of the cartoon and went far beyond simply stating that some people were offended, but was willing to say that the cartoon itself was offensive," Siegel said.

The Jewish community mobilized in response to the cartoon, which Jewish leaders say helped lead to Sunday's editorial.

Senior Jewish United Fund volunteers and professional leaders met with Tribune editors, and the Jewish Community Relations Council wrote a communal response to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel pressing on tech transfer

Israel's foreign minister is calling for closer scrutiny of Iran's nuclear program.

"This is not just a threat for Israel, this is a threat for the whole world," Silvan Shalom said Monday after meeting with his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov.

Israel and the United States have long claimed that Russia is helping Iran build nuclear weapons by transferring technology that can be used for this purpose.

Russia denies that its technology or expertise is being used for Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Abbas denounces terrorism

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas defended his statements at last week's summit in Jordan and again urged Palestinian terror groups to renew cease-fire talks.

Many Palestinians have criticized Abbas for being too conciliatory at the summit, which focused on the U.S.-backed peace plan, known as the "road map."

At a news conference Monday in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Abbas also said the statements he made at the summit were coordinated with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Egypt is dispatching a top intelligence official to try to mediate among the various Palestinian groups, Israel Radio reported.

Deportation policy resumed

Israeli will resume deporting illegal Chinese workers because of SARS fears.

The deportations were suspended a month ago after Israel's national carrier, El Al, suspended flights to China because of the SARS outbreak, Israel Radio reported.

The policy was renewed after agreements were reached with other carriers to provide flights to China, the report said.



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the paper's editor. Another emotional response was a letter to the editor sent to the Tribune by Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif), who said he was "astonished, sickened, and infuriated" by the cartoon.

He added that as a Holocaust survivor, it "caused me painful deja vu. Can this really have been published in the America of the 21st century?"

In the Tribune's initial response to the outcry, Don Wycliff, public editor of the paper, who has been heavily criticized by the Chicago Jewish community for his earlier treatment of Israel-related matters, wrote a column about the cartoon in the paper's June 1 edition.

He acknowledged that the cartoon "crossed all the lines," but said the editorial staffers who made the decision to run it "did not knowingly try to smuggle an anti-Semitic cartoon into the newspaper."

Responding to Wycliff's column, Rosenberg's letter, which was published alongside the apology on Sunday, said Wycliff and the Tribune "went only part way in recognizing and acknowledging the true nature of the offense which they have committed."

"Hopefully the Tribune itself will come to a better understanding of the potential impact of the bigotry-laden stereotypes which permeated the odious cartoon it chose to run. And with that understanding must come an apology not just to the Jewish community but to the community at large," he wrote.

For his part, Locher defended the cartoon in an interview with Editor & Publisher Online.

"I was trying to go to bat for the American taxpayer," Locher said. "Israel is a good friend, but let's get an accounting of where the money is going."

In addition, Locher said he always draws a similar big nose on Arafat, and did not intend for the depiction of Sharon to be anti-Semitic.

"Editorial cartoonists work with exaggeration," he said.

The Anti-Defamation League said it had been disappointed and saddened by Locher's response.

"Rather than accepting this as a 'teaching moment' to educate the public about the evils of anti-Semitism and the persistence of anti-Jewish images through the centuries, Locher unfortunately has decided to stand behind a disturbing work that has offended many in the Jewish community," the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, said in a statement last week.

The syndicated cartoon was later published in newspapers other than the Tribune, and drew flak in at least one of them.

The Denver Post, which ran the cartoon June 4, received an angry letter to the editor from the Denver branch of the ADL.

In a response published last Friday, the Post's editorial page editor, Sue O'Brien, agreed that the cartoon made a "seriously incorrect factual suggestion" and said, "I deeply regret have published it." □

(Cindy Sher is a staff writer for JUF News in Chicago.)

Abbas snubs Berlusconi

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Mahmoud Abbas will not meet with visiting Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi because of the latter's refusal to see Yasser Arafat, Palestinian sources said.

Berlusconi arrived in the region Monday at the start of a trip to the Middle East. He was slated to hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President Moshe Katsav.

Israel has said it will boycott visits with foreign dignitaries who see Arafat. □

Israeli bonds to sell in U.S.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel is having its first bond offering in the United States in three years.

No date has been set for the up to \$500 million in 10-year bonds that will be offered.

Israel has never defaulted on its loans in its 55-year history. □

JEWISH WORLD

German Jewish pact OK'd

Germany's Parliament approved an agreement that will triple government funding to the country's Jewish community.

Last Friday's move endorsed the agreement reached in January between German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and German Jewish leader Paul Spiegel that gives the country's Jewish community the same legal standing as the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches.

As a result of the agreement, the Central Council of Jews in Germany will receive an annual stipend of 3 million euros, or about \$3.5 million.

Putin, Jews to discuss 'road map'

Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to meet with U.S. Jewish leaders to discuss the "road map" for peace and Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran. The delegation, slated to meet Putin in Moscow on Tuesday, includes leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Plane crash kills 5

The Los Angeles Jewish community is mourning the death of three of its members killed when a single-engine airplane crashed into a three-story apartment building in the city.

Among the dead in last Friday's crash are Jeffrey Siegel, the pilot of the six-seat Beechcraft Bonanza; his niece and passenger, Jessica Kaplan, 24, a screenwriter; and Tibor Reis, 78, a resident of the apartment building.

Two other victims were charred beyond recognition and have not been identified.

Orthodox head picked

Rabbi Basil Herring will lead the rabbinical arm of the modern Orthodox movement. Herring, a pulpit rabbi, author and expert on synagogue life, was elected executive vice president at the recent annual convention of the Rabbinical Council of America in New York.

Herring replaces Steven Dworken, who died in January after leading the group for a decade. Herring has been the executive chairman of the Orthodox Caucus, an advocacy group, and he lectures at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women.

Turkish Schindler dies

Selahattin Ulkumen, a Turkish diplomat who saved 42 Jewish families on the island of Rhodes during World War II, died Saturday at 89.

In 1944, Ulkumen, then Turkey's consul general on Rhodes, issued exit visas to Turkish Jewish families living on the island. His house in Rhodes was bombed in retaliation.

Secret files in Argentine bombing will help case, country's Jews hope

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentine Jews are enthusiastic about a decision by their newly elected president, Nestor Kirchner, to release secret evidence related to a 1994 bombing at a Jewish community center that killed 85 people.

"Dignity for Argentine Jews has been restored," said Abraham Kaul, the president of the AMIA center, where the bombing occurred.

Jewish leaders here and abroad have said Argentina's inability to find the culprits is due to incompetence, corruption and anti-Semitism among security and government officials.

But the decision regarding the secret files, first conveyed to Jewish leaders during a June 5 meeting with the president, provides a glimmer of hope that progress in the investigation will be made quickly.

The decision, which will open the files of the state's intelligence agency, is being seen as a positive indication that Kirchner is committed to pursuing the investigation of the bombing — especially since Kirchner made the announcement fewer than two weeks after taking office.

Kirchner was elected president last month after a rival candidate, former President Carlos Menem, dropped out of a runoff.

"This is one of the most important pieces of news in nine years," Kaul told local media after meeting with Kirchner last week.

The decision annuls a decision by Argentina's previous president, Eduardo Duhalde, sealing the files.

Some Jewish leaders are concerned, however, whether employees of the intelligence agency, known as SIDE, will be able to testify about the attack, believed to be the work of Iran and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah.

Although Kirchner told the Jewish leaders that 14 intelligence officers will be allowed to testify, that was not part of the official announcement made about releasing the files.

The AMIA bombing, which occurred July 18, 1994, was the second to hit Argentina's Jewish community in two years.

On March 17, 1992, a blast at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires killed 29 people. That attack also remains unsolved.

According to local media, the SIDE received information in May 1994 from diplomats in Lebanon that gave advance notice of an upcoming terrorist attack.

"We expect this secret information will be useful," said Enrique Zadoff, a local community leader. "And we want to have the declarations of the SIDE members, too, to see what they can bring to the case."

Relatives who lost family members to the attack long been among the most vocal critics of the slow nature of the investigation.

After hearing about Kirchner's announcement, Olga Detiar, who lost her 21-year-old son, Christian, in the AMIA blast, expressed cautious optimism.

"We are tired of promises. But we have hope that things might change this time," Detiar said. □

Jewish group honors artists

NEW YORK (JTA) — Leonard Nimoy was among several Jewish cultural figures who received achievement awards from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Nimoy, known for his portrayal of Mr. Spock on "Star Trek," stoked a controversy last year when he published a book of black-and-white photographs of women, many naked but for prayer shawls and tefillin.

Radio producer David Isay, who produced the Yiddish Radio Project that aired on U.S. public radio, and poet Adrienne Rich were also honored at the June 2 event in New York. The event raised \$500,000 for the foundation's Fund for Jewish Documentary Filmmaking. □

Spanish city celebrates tolerance, reaps benefits from Israel embrace

By Jerome Socolovsky

MURCIA, Spain (JTA) — About a decade ago, this city in the arid south of Spain put up a plaque to mark the location of its old Jewish quarter, or “Juderia” as it’s called in Spanish.

Then researchers in the municipal archive made some surprising discoveries about the fate of Jews in a time when mass anti-Semitic hysteria and pogroms were sweeping the rest of the land.

So up went another plaque.

“In this city,” the new plaque says, “not a single Jew suffered a violent death at the hands of Christians, and the Juderia was neither assaulted nor robbed.”

Today, the leaders of this city are making every effort to honor that legacy. While the rest of Europe appears more interested in condemning and even boycotting Israeli businesses and culture, Murcia is aggressively courting them.

“Our character is different,” says the city’s deputy mayor, Antonio Gonzalez Barnes. “We have a solid foundation of understanding.”

Barnes notes that when the Israeli ambassador unveiled the new plaque last year at the height of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “there was not a single anti-Israeli protest, slogan or graffiti here.”

Murcia is a pleasant city about the size of Tel Aviv with splendid architecture, a thriving café scene and some of the best cuisine in Spain. It is off the beaten track for tourists because of poor access — but that may change with the coming of a new highway to Madrid.

Murcia is also the capital of an agricultural region that locals call Huerta de Europa, or “Europe’s Market Garden,” because it produces tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables that are served on dinner tables around the continent.

With endless stretches of lush farmland and arid mountain ranges, a visitor might be forgiven for thinking he was in Israel.

Barnes certainly understands that sense of familiarity.

“The whole system of irrigation in Murcia is ‘made in Israel,’ ” he says. “The problem of Israel — no water — is the same problem as ours.”

In recent years, city officials have crisscrossed Israel, visiting kibbutzim and talking to scientists. Murcia now has more trade with Israel than with all of Israel’s Arab neighbors put together.

The deputy mayor, who is also alderman for culture, says he has worked closely with the Israeli Embassy in Spain to stage an annual “Murcia: Three Cultures” festival, which celebrates the medieval period of interfaith harmony.

In those days, Murcia was a semiautonomous kingdom that was resisting edicts from the rulers of Spain, says Maria Angeles Jover, the director of the city’s archive.

And while Murcia’s rulers couldn’t disobey royal edicts from the Spanish kings — such as the 1492 expulsion edict — they were deliberately slow in implementing ordinances aimed at making life difficult for Jews.

When the rabidly anti-Semitic preacher Vicente Ferrer came to town to stir up trouble, the city governors allowed the Jews to defend themselves, she says.

It is estimated that about 1,000 Jews lived in the city at that time, about one-fifth of Murcia’s population. As hostility raged in

surrounding territories in the course of the 15th century, many Jews sought refuge in Murcia, the archivist says.

Many Murciano Jews survived the Inquisition because they didn’t have to go through neighboring kingdoms to board ships leaving from the coast. The Murcian port of Cartagena is only 20 miles away from the regional capital.

“Eight hundred years ago, it was possible to have coexistence here without the spilling of blood, and so there’s no reason we can’t have it now,” he says.

The Three Cultures festival began as a response to racist attacks against Muslims several years ago in the nearby province of Almeria, another agricultural region depending on immigrant labor from North Africa.

Many see it as no coincidence that several Al-Qaida suspects arrested in Spain have come from these regions.

While Murcia’s city government is also working with Arab countries on the festival, Barnes says the Israeli Embassy has provided the most enthusiastic support.

“From the first moment, they understood the importance of this festival,” he says.

Every year, the festival has an exhibit devoted to Jewish life in medieval Murcia, and a monthlong series of concerts representing the three cultures and the message of tolerance.

This year, Israeli-American singer David Broza, along with several klezmer and Sephardic groups, headlined the festival along with Algerian pop star Cheb Khaled and African-American opera diva Barbara Hendricks.

City Hall also sponsored the publication of a bound collection of essays and interviews with Israeli writers such as A.B. Yehoshua, Meir Shalev and Amos Oz.

The President of the Murcia-Israel Friendship Association is City Council member Rosa Fructuoso. She says support for Israel is also strong among local voters.

“Being against Israel is not a wise electoral stance,” says Fructuoso, who is a member of the Spanish Socialist Party, which at the national level is critical of Israel.

Sofia Lopez, a mother and painter, never misses the Jewish exhibit. This year she came wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt.

“I was born the same year as the state of Israel, and I always defend it,” she says.

But for her, the exhibit symbolizes not only the good life Jews once had here, but also the bad ending brought about King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella’s decree.

“It bothered the rulers that there were people who were smarter than they were,” she says. □

Czech victims honored

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Jewish community leaders paid homage to more than 3,000 Holocaust victims from a Czech town.

During Sunday’s memorial service at the Jewish cemetery in Olomouc conducted by Czech Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon, Jewish community representatives also lit candles for the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust.

Nearly 3,300 Jews were deported from Olomouc to concentration camps in June and July 1942. Only 250 of them survived the war.

The current Jewish community has 130 members. □