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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon goes to Britain

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon arrived in Britain on a trip aimed at improving strained relations between the two countries.

During his trip, which began Sunday, Sharon is expected to meet with Prime Minister Tony Blair, as well as other top leaders.

Before Sharon's trip, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas asked Blair to pressure Sharon to release more Palestinian prisoners, Israel Radio said.

In January, Britain hosted a conference on Palestinian reform without inviting Israeli representatives.

Israel responded by preventing Palestinian delegates from traveling to the meeting.

Blair then refused to meet with then-Israeli Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Truman blasted Jews in diary

Former President Truman called Jews "very, very selfish" in a recently discovered diary.

The 1947 diary entry is based on a conversation Truman had with Henry Morgenthau, Treasury secretary under President Franklin Roosevelt. Morgenthau was seeking Truman's aid in an issue with a Jewish ship in Palestine, and Truman wrote that Morgenthau had "no business" to contact him.

"The Jews have no sense of proportion nor do they have any judgment on world affairs," Truman wrote. He went on to write that Jews seek "special treatment."

The Truman administration was the first to recognize Israel after the Jewish state was declared in 1948.

Sharon to visit U.S.

Ariel Sharon will meet with President Bush in Washington the last week of July.

Israeli officials in Washington say the White House asked the Israeli prime minister to move forward his next trip to the United States, tentatively scheduled for September, to shore up support for U.S. efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Sharon's visit will come just days after Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, is scheduled to meet with U.S. officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Remains unearthed in Belarus town as stadium expanded over cemetery

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Belarus has come under periodic criticism for a mixed record on preserving its Jewish heritage sites.

But this summer the former Soviet republic has been placed under especially intense pressure because of its treatment of one of the oldest sites in the nation, which was once home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

Since mid-June, some European Jewish leaders and Western diplomats have put up fierce resistance to halt the ongoing construction over a historic Jewish cemetery in the town of Grodno.

Their efforts culminated last week, when E.U. representatives stationed in Belarus publicly protested the excavation of a 300-year-old cemetery, which is being dug up to expand a soccer stadium.

The dispute is highlighting differences among Belarussian officials, foreign Jewish leaders and Belarussian leaders over how this particular Jewish site should be treated.

Recently, British and Israeli rabbis representing the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe traveled to Belarus to check on reports that excavation of the New Jewish cemetery had begun — part of which had already been compromised some 50 years ago by a sports facility built on part of the former burial grounds. Rabbi Hershel Gluck of the London-based group said his group saw numerous signs of vandalism and disrespect to the remains that would shock "any civilized human being."

The committee members reported that human remains had been dug out of the ground as a result of the construction work.

The extensive digging attracted many locals — some in search of "Jewish gold," others because of the horrifying effect of the construction.

Charter-97, a liberal opposition group in Belarus, recently reported that a 29-year-old Grodno citizen found 14 human skulls at a dumping ground near his home adjacent to the former cemetery. The man, who is not Jewish, reportedly took the remains home, hoping to give them a proper burial.

The dispute is taking place in a town with a Jewish community that is a fraction of its prewar size. Located near Belarus' border with Poland and Lithuania, Grodno had long been known as one of the prime centers of Polish-Lithuanian Jewry.

Beginning in the 18th century, Jews were a majority of the town's population. But more than 20,000 Grodno Jews and as many Jews from the surrounding area were sent to death camps or killed on the spot during the Holocaust. Many of the victims were buried in the New Cemetery.

Following the near-total destruction of Grodno's Jewry — only a few hundred Jews survived the Holocaust and returned to the town after the war — the Soviet authorities consigned the town's Jewish past to oblivion.

Now that past has become a matter of international debate.

Belarus officials, who did not respond when contacted by JTA, have pledged to rebury the remains dislodged as a result of the excavation.

For his part, Gluck says building should not take place on a sacred site.

But local leaders — raised under the Communist regime and perhaps with an eye toward the authoritarian regime of President Alexander Lukashenko — disagree.

The New Cemetery was closed in 1958, and most of its tombstones removed.

"Fifty years ago, no one made any noise because of this," said Boris Kvyatkovsky,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Missing driver kidnapped?

Israel asked the Palestinian Authority to ensure the safe return of a missing Israeli taxi driver.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday that he had asked the Palestinian security minister, Mohammed Dahlan, to ensure the safe return of Elyahu Gurel, Israel Radio reported. Gurel, 61, has been missing since last Friday after dropping off passengers in Jerusalem. It is possible that Gurel is being held as a bargaining chip to release Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel.

P.A. collecting weapons

Hamas and Islamic Jihad threatened to end their cease-fire against Israel if the Palestinian Authority tries to collect their weapons. The comments released by the group in a joint statement came as the Palestinian Authority collected weapons and arrested some 20 gunmen in the Gaza Strip over the weekend, Israel's defense minister said.

Palestinians trash scholar's office

Palestinians ransacked the office of an academic just before he was set to release a survey of Palestinian refugees.

The trashing of Khalil Shikaki's office in Ramallah on Sunday forced him to cancel a news conference during which he was to announce that a survey showed that most Palestinian refugees are prepared to give up their demands for a "right of return" to Israel in exchange for financial compensation.

Israel captures IRA man

Israel captured an IRA bomb expert believed to be training Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank.

The announcement of the arrest came Sunday after the British Observer magazine reported that the man arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport three weeks ago and entered the country on a British passport.



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chairman of the Grodno Jewish religious community, which today numbers between 600 and 1,000 members.

"Those who wanted were allowed to remove the graves to other cemeteries, but most of the graves were not moved anywhere," he said.

In 1963, a soccer stadium was built on approximately one-fifth of the grounds of the former cemetery.

This year, the authorities decided to enlarge the facility — home of the soccer club Neman — to comply with the regulations of the European soccer union.

"In the 50s and the 60s, they removed the tombstones but left the vast majorities of graves intact," Gluck told JTA. "But now they are basically uncovering and destroying the graves."

Gluck and his fellow rabbis insisted that no further digging work within the boundaries of the cemetery should be conducted, and that the excavated dirt should be returned to where it was before the construction began.

They also say further work on the site should be conducted after consultations with Jewish experts to ensure that the site is not further desecrated.

The governor of the Grodno Region insists that any agreement pertaining to the cemetery should state that the area has not been a Jewish cemetery for the last 45 years, and that any graves had long been removed.

A release issued by the preservation committee states otherwise: About half of this huge cemetery remains undisturbed.

Gluck says the ongoing work violates not only Jewish law, but also the human rights of those buried in the cemetery — as well as Belarus' own legislation that allows the use of former burial plots for other purposes only after 25 years have expired since the last burial. In the case of the Grodno cemetery, the stadium was built within five years after the cemetery was closed in 1958.

Kvyatkovsky says the committee's demands are very difficult to meet. He said a commission made up of local civil and Jewish officials has agreed to continue with the work in a more sensitive manner.

The stadium was slated to be completed by the end of this month.

"We have agreed that after the stadium is completed, we will rebury all the remains that were uncovered and put up a memorial on the site saying this was a Jewish cemetery," Kvyatkovsky said.

"To us this is now a closed matter," he said, referring to the point of view of part of the Grodno Jewish community.

But Gluck says he and his fellow committee members view the agreement as insufficient.

"I still believe that certain things can be done to stop the desecration," he said. "A plaque about the cemetery is very important but in no way does it serve as an excuse for the uprooting and the desecration of the cemetery."

In the meantime, Gluck's committee is appealing to Western diplomats and European soccer officials to have all the work on the cemetery halted until Belarussian authorities accept an agreement promising to meet standards of Jewish law and preserve the sacred status of the burial ground. □

Al-Qaida suspect knows brachot

LONDON (JTA) — A British man being held in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp for his alleged support for Al-Qaida attended a Jewish elementary school. Moazzem Begg, who along with another Briton has been held on suspicion of passing funds to the terrorist organization, was a student at the King David School in Birmingham in the English Midlands.

Former students and faculty from the school, which also serves non-Jewish students, have described Begg as a popular student who had many Jewish friends. Begg, who has been held at the detention camp in Cuba for over a year, dropped out of a post-graduate law program to become a devout Muslim, and moved with his family to Afghanistan in 2001. One classmate told the London Jewish Chronicle, "I can remember he was a nice lad. He knew the brachot better than I did, and could read Hebrew too." □

JEWISH WORLD

New White House program says faith can help prevent drug use

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Several Jewish groups are supporting a new federal program aimed at helping faith-based institutions fight drug and alcohol abuse.

On July 10, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy announced a new program that targets synagogues and churches, encouraging them to focus on preventing youth drug use, specifically of marijuana.

"This tool kit is going to be a lifesaver for churches that don't know how to talk to kids about the subject, but want to," said Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The campaign's slogan, one of a series, is "Faith. The Anti-Drug."

While many Jewish groups have opposed the Bush administration's interest in faith-based initiatives, claiming they blur the line between church and state, several Jewish groups, including the United Jewish Communities and the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, are involved in the drug project, entitled "Pathways to Prevention: Guiding Youth to Wise Decisions."

"We are concerned about government funding of sectarian material, but this is not the case at all," said Rabbi Eric Lankin, director of religious and educational activities at UJC, the umbrella organization of the Jewish federation system.

He said Jewish communities should utilize the material the government is providing and craft Jewish material to complement it.

"We need to realize this is no longer a gentile problem," said Lankin, who claimed that marijuana use is rising among Jewish teenagers. "We need to be much more aggressive."

John Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the program is an acknowledgment that faith plays a large role in many teenagers' lives, and that drug prevention programs utilizing faith can be effective.

"We are trying to recognize that we need to find more people pathways to recovery that are right for them," Walters said.

Not everyone agrees. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, argues that a "merger" between government and faith institutions is unconstitutional.

"The Bush administration seems to think there's a 'faith-based' solution to every social and medical problem in America," Lynn said. "The project announced today is one very small part of a larger crusade that raises troubling constitutional concerns."

Lynn cited Walters' recent appearance at a "Teen Challenge" facility whose treatment program includes conversion to fundamentalist Christianity. Walters said the program does not take government funding and is part of a diverse network that offers drug counseling.

Lankin said UJC and other Jewish groups are well aware of the constitutional concerns about faith-based issues, but are trying to work with the government without crossing that line. "It's very easy to say no," he said. "It's very sophisticated to create a nuanced response."

Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, an opponent of federal funding of faith-based initiatives, said he does not see a problem with the new program, but worries that it will be only a temporary measure before funding is moved toward faith-based programs.

"It does indeed seem like something that would be appropriate," he said. "But it's unlikely that today's announcement is the last we'll here on this subject." □

Labor politicians visit Gaza

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Legislators from Israel's Labor Party visited the Gaza Strip on Sunday to try to advance their support for an Israeli withdrawal.

Labor legislators are calling for an evacuation of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. □

Ukrainian Jewish leader booted

A Ukrainian Jewish leader was "excommunicated." The chief rabbi of Ukraine, Yaakov Dov Bleich, and the recently formed Council of Leaders of All-Ukrainian Jewish Organizations have declared Josef Zissels, chairman of the Vaad of Ukraine umbrella organization, to be persona non grata in the Jewish community.

Dated June 24, the declaration cites charges against Zissels including activity, "which seriously damages the Jewish community of Ukraine, its unity and integrity, promotes anti-Semitism and interethnic intolerance."

Zissels describes the charges as politically motivated, stemming from his opposition to the construction of a planned community center as well as issues of community leadership and funding-control.

Iraqi Jews get help

Two Jewish groups began aiding Iraqi Jews last week.

The 30-some person Jewish community in Baghdad began receiving aid from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which is being distributed by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

"This is a small-size program, both because of the number of Jews there is small and the time horizon for their stay is limited," said Steven Schwager, JDC's executive vice president.

German Parliament approves pact

The upper house of the German Parliament approved an agreement to fund the country's Jewish community.

The treaty ratified last Friday by the Bundesrat provides roughly \$3.4 million a year to Germany's 100,000-member Jewish community.

The contract, similar to those between the German government and the Protestant and Catholic churches, was signed in January by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, on the 58th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

The agreement already has been approved by Parliament's lower house, the Bundestag.

Israeli president tours camp

Israeli President Moshe Katsav commemorated those killed at Croatia's largest concentration camp.

Katsav toured Jasenovac on Sunday along with Croatian officials and representatives of the Serb, Jewish and Gypsy communities — all of whom suffered during World War II, when Croatia was ruled by a Nazi-puppet regime.

Katsav's visit to Croatia is part of improving relations between Israel and Croatia in recent years.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Spaniard evokes Dreyfus Affair as she battles elite anti-Semitism

By Jerome Socolovsky

MADRID (JTA) — Jews from all over the Madrid area recently crammed into an auditorium to hear what the petite woman with piercing eyes and fiery red highlights in her hair had to say.

“What’s a girl like me doing in a place like this?” she said as she took the microphone at the Madrid Jewish Community Center.

She began by recalling her Roman Catholic origins and her political career as a leftist legislator from Barcelona, a center of anti-American and anti-Israeli attitudes.

Only a few months earlier, Stars of David were burned in the streets in massive protests against the war in Iraq.

And then she answered her question: “Because a Jewish problem is never a Jewish problem alone. It’s a European problem, it’s a Western problem, and it’s a problem for democracy.”

Pilar Rahola, who is now in her 40s, made a name for herself in Spain as a feminist and a children’s rights advocate.

One of her best-selling books, “Ada’s History,” named after a 2-year-old Siberian girl she adopted, is about the violation of children’s rights around the world.

Now she is drawing attention in Israel and America because of her latest crusade. It is against what she describes as a pervasive anti-Semitic bias among the leftist political and intellectual elites in Spain and Europe.

Rahola spoke in May at the American Jewish Committee annual meeting in Washington, where a member of the audience suggested she be made one of the “Righteous Among Nations,” or non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

In Israel, she’s becoming known as the “Oriana Fallaci of Spain,” named after the Italian journalist who is known for criticizing the revival of anti-Semitism in Europe. Only around 15,000 Jews live in Spain, a country of 40 million. At her first official appearance before Madrid’s Jewish community, Rahola sounded more like French novelist Emile Zola fighting for French Capt. Alfred Dreyfus during the early 20th century.

Proclaiming “Yo acuso!” — a Spanish version of Zola’s “J’accuse!” — she indicted her own “colleagues and friends” on the left for what she said was nothing less than a visceral anti-Semitism coloring their views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And that’s the case, she insisted, even though they prefer to call it anti-Zionism.

“Anti-Zionism is a much more convenient banner because it doesn’t come across as a xenophobic stance,” she said. “Of course, no leftist ideologue will admit they’re anti-Semitic. They’ll smile and say, ‘Many of my friends are Jewish,’ and ‘I love Woody Allen.’”

Such words are almost never heard in Spain, outside of Jewish circles. On the contrary, anti-Jewish notions pervade even the mainstream media and much of the public as well.

Last fall, a survey by the Anti-Defamation League indicated that Spaniards were the most likely in Europe to harbor views colored by anti-Semitism. The survey found that 71 percent of Spaniards believe “Jews have too much power in international financial markets,” and 57 percent “believe Jews still talk too much about the Holocaust.”

Rahola said Spanish media panders to such attitudes and distorts the Mideast conflict in a way that eases Spaniards’ latent sense of guilt over the persecution of Jews in Europe since the Spanish Inquisition.

“The bad Israeli on the tank recalls in a way the image of the evil Jew that was so handy for the symbolism of medieval Spain and Europe,” she said. “That’s why it’s there, because in the end it reduces the feeling of guilt.”

She accused the Spanish and European left of ignoring the threat that Islamic terrorism poses to Western civilization. Instead, it has excused and blamed on Jews — “because the death of Jews is a Jewish problem and therefore not ‘our problem.’”

Rahola is the most vocal of a small but growing group of intellectuals who are questioning the anti-Israeli dogmatism in Spanish society. Another one is Gabriel Albiac, a columnist for *El Mundo* newspaper.

“For years I’ve been trying to analyze the Middle East conflict from a rational perspective, and the only thing that provokes are widespread reactions of extreme hatred,” he said in a telephone interview.

Charles Powell, a historian at the Royal Elcano Institute in Madrid, said that anti-Semitism “lies very deep in the roots of Spanish cultural identity.”

Modern Spain emerged with the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, and for hundreds of years there have been virtually no Jews in the country to provide a real human and somewhat corrective reference to anti-Semitic attitudes, the historian noted.

“It’s more a latent, implicit than an actively belligerent anti-Semitism,” Powell said, “but the result is that Spaniards on the whole, of whatever political persuasion, have tended to feel little sympathy for the Israeli cause.”

Aside from the odd newspaper column, the Spanish media and literary establishment on the whole remains unresponsive to anyone trying to make a case sympathetic to Israel.

At the Jewish community center, Rahola said with a note of sarcasm that some progress is being made in combating anti-Semitic prejudices.

At least when she’s part of a discussion panel, “the others restrain themselves.” But Rahola said Spanish criticism of Israel is often hypocritical. Spaniards have their own problem with the Basque terrorist group ETA, which mostly targets individual politicians.

“But if we in Spain would be afraid to even get on a bus, or go to a café, would we have the democracy that we have? I’m not so sure,” she said.

Rahola noted that while Israeli leaders are raked over hot coals, Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd is always welcomed “as a friend of the people” at his summer vacation palace in the Spanish Mediterranean resort of Marbella.

As Rahola spoke, she had to stop several times for cheers from the audience. A man in the back shouted: “This woman’s got guts!”

But she also had an accusation for them — that they had been silent for too long out of a “logical” reflex developed throughout ages of grinning and bearing it.

Indeed, Jewish community leaders have long kept a low profile and sought to make their case behind the scenes. “This country doesn’t need passive Jews, it needs active Jews. I want a Spain with active Jews,” she said, “because Judaism is by nature democratic and you are the guarantors of our democracy.” □