

IN THE NEWS

House to denounce world court's ruling

The U.S. House of Representatives was expected to vote on a bill denouncing the International Court of Justice's ruling against Israel's security fence.

The House was expected to take up the resolution Wednesday, sponsored by Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.), that would express support for Israel's right to construct the fence in the West Bank and chastise the international court, which last week issued a non-binding opinion calling the fence illegal.

Chirac: Je ne regrette rien

French President Jacques Chirac said he did not regret his condemnation of an anti-Semitic attack that turned out to be a hoax.

Speaking Wednesday during a nationally televised interview for Bastille Day — France's national holiday — Chirac referred to growing anti-Semitism in France by saying that "there can always be manipulated situations which follow on from the bad climate that has developed."

Asked whether his condemnation of the phony attack had been a mistake, Chirac said, "I don't regret it." Chirac was one of the first to condemn an alleged anti-Semitic attack on a woman and baby July 9.

the woman — who is not Jewish — admitted Tuesday to police that she staged the attack.

Day-after plan for Arafat death

An Israeli Foreign Ministry advisory reportedly urged the government not to allow Yasser Arafat to be buried in Jerusalem.

Media reports said the contingency plan noted that whether Arafat, the Palestinian Authority president, dies from natural causes or as a result of Israeli military actions, a flare-up of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip likely would follow.

WORLD REPORT

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Few clues, no certainty 10 years after Panamanian airline bombing

By BRIAN HARRIS

PANAMA CITY, Panama (JTA) — Ten years after a bomber blew up a short-haul flight here, killing all 21 people on the commuter plane, including a dozen local Jews, authorities still have no idea who was behind the attack.

On the afternoon of July 19, 1994, the Alas Chiricanas flight departed from the Caribbean port of Colon for Panama City, a trip of about 20 minutes.

It was a familiar commute for most of those on board, passengers who worked at Colon's tax-free wholesale market for Asian goods.

Instead, the flight turned into a disturbing and enduring mystery.

Because the bombing occurred during the deadliest week ever for Jews in Latin America — the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires had been bombed a day earlier, killing 85 people and wounding 300 — some Jews are convinced the Panama bombing was the work of Arab terrorists.

Hezbollah terrorists are suspected in the AMIA bombing, which is believed to have been sponsored by Iran.

But other evidence in the airline attack points to drug cartels in neighboring Colombia, who had used a similar modus operandi to eliminate rivals and debtors in the past.

Panamanian authorities say they're not certain about either theory.

So far, they say, they are treating the bombing as a case of murder with possible terrorist overtones.

A decade later and without a single arrest to show for their efforts, authorities concede

they may never find out who was behind the attack unless someone comes forward with a credible claim of responsibility. That hasn't happened.

All the speculations "are indicators, nothing more, for forming a theory. But to present charges in front of a judge we have to have much more evidence," the lead judicial investigator in the case, Maritza Royo, told JTA.

Asked whether it was an anti-Semitic attack, she said, "the pieces never fully fit in place." But she admits that the same holds true for the theory about a drug-related revenge bombing.

Royo's efforts are centered on determining the bomber's identity.

The man who blew up the plane checked in for the flight using the phony name Lya Jamal; his true identity never has been ascer-

tained.

Only the bomber's torso was recovered from the crash, and no one claimed the remains, which lay in the country's morgue for eight years before being buried in a local cemetery.

Airline employees helped the police draw a sketch of the bomber, but even a \$5 million reward for information — offered by the United States — has failed to produce anyone willing to identify the man, who witnesses say was uncommunicative but apparently of Arab origin.

There is some evidentiary support for the theory that the bombing was the work of Arab terrorists.

Most of the passengers on the flight were Panamanian Jews, members of a traditional

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BOMBING AND ITS AFTERMATH

■ Panama authorities still speculating on attack that killed 12 Jews

Continued from page 1

and tight-knit community that is well-known in Latin America for its strong political and financial support for Israel.

Given the disfigurement of the bomber's body, he may have been trained to explode his bomb in such a way that authorities would be unable to identify him.

Though less than a pound of explosives were used, the bomber sat in the seat in the small plane where the greatest damage could be inflicted.

Israeli security agents claim there had been an increase in travel between Buenos Aires and Panama City by people of Arab origin in the months before the Alas Chiricanas and AMIA bombings.

Shortly after the bombing, Panamanian officials detained three Arab men with false passports who had tried to cross the border into Costa Rica, a common route for illegal migrants trying to enter the United States.

The men released after authorities could not link them to the attack.

■
The other theory, that the plane was brought down by Colombian drug lords, has some support too.

In an airliner bombing blamed on drug lords the previous year in Colombia, there also was no claim of responsibility.

The explosives used to blow up the Panamanian plane matched the explosives used in the Colombian bombing.

One of the Alas Chiricanas passengers, gold merchant Saul Schwartz, recently had had \$2 million in assets frozen

by authorities on suspicion of money laundering.

Schwartz apparently was separated from his bodyguards only when aboard the plane.

Authorities say the bomber insisted on getting on to the flight only after Schwartz confirmed his reservation.

In addition, Alas Chiricanas was not a Jewish-owned company.

Also significantly, more Jews were expected to travel on a flight that was set to leave a few minutes later.

The bombing came at a time when so-called narco-terrorism by drug lords was at its peak in Colombia.

In any case, the inability to determine who was behind the bombing has left victims' families frustrated and bewildered.

With no one to blame, their grieving mostly has been a combination of confusion and unease.

That sense continues to pervade their lives to this day, they said.

"I want, for my own peace of mind, to know the final verdict," said Mayer Attie.

Attie lost his son Albert and brother Emmanuel on the flight.

Knowing "is not going to bring back either my son or my brother," he said. But "by not knowing who it was, I cannot say who my anger is directed at," he added.

Within the Jewish community, the lack of suspects or arrests has generated serious concern.

And neither theory about the bombing bodes well for them.

If Arab terrorists were responsible, it would shatter the Jews' view of Panama as an inclusive and friendly country for Jews.

It would also sully generations of amicable relations between Jews and Arabs here.

On the other hand, if the bombing was meant specifically to kill Schwartz, that would make Schwartz — and his remaining family — somewhat responsible for the tragedy.

Since the bombing, at least one victim's daughter has become friendly with Schwartz's children, the eldest of whom

was only 8 years old at the time of the bombing.

Schwartz's family is Ashkenazi, while most of the other Jewish victims were Sephardi, as is the majority of Panama's Jewish community.

"I want shalom — you understand," community leader David Hanono said, speaking of the sense of peace the Jewish community seeks.

Hanono helped out the victims' families immediately after the attack, and he since has become the liaison between the Jewish community and local authorities in charge of the in-

If Arab terrorists were responsible, it would shatter the Jews' view of Panama as an inclusive and friendly country for them.

vestigation.

But Hanono refuses to speculate on who was behind the bombing.

Caution in attributing blame has not always been shared by foreign security services.

After the bombing, Israeli officials were quick to blame Hezbollah.

They now say only that Hezbollah "probably" perpetrated the bombing.

Early on, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials cast suspicion on the drug cartels.

But the \$5 million reward they offered is more in line with terrorist events connected to Middle Eastern groups.

The United States got involved in the case because an American businessman was among those aboard.

In Panama, members of the Sephardi Jewish community live with constant reminders of the killings, ten years after the fact.

The expansive Shevet Ahim synagogue has a memorial to the day's dead.

At the newer Ahvat Sion synagogue, which opened in 1999, the building's dome is dedicated in memory of Albert Attie.

And a large chandelier is dedicated to Issac Harrouche and his son Mauricio, who were all killed in the blast.

But with the 10th anniversary of the bombing just days away, only a handful of commemoration ceremonies are expected to take place.

Services will be held at some local Jewish schools in addition to a Catholic mass planned for the victims. ■

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Old foes and friends, Sharon, Peres talk unity

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the slow inevitability of ships meeting out at sea, Israel's two elder statesmen appear to be coming together to steer the country through one of the most turbulent periods in its history.

Opposition leader Shimon Peres on Tuesday won his Labor Party's approval to accept Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's offer of talks on a national unity government.

For most Israelis, a deal between the two longtime political rivals — and personal friends — appeared a given, with the only question being how the rest of the future coalition would look.

The current government, under Sharon's Likud Party, needs urgent buttressing. He fired two ministers from the right-wing National Union bloc last month to win Cabinet approval for his plan to withdraw Israeli troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

That left Sharon in command of just 59 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, with another right-wing coalition partner, the National Religious Party, threatening to bolt over Sharon's determination to cede land to the Palestinians.

Allying with Labor means the support of its 19 lawmakers for Sharon's Gaza

plan, a political lifeline Peres is well aware of.

"They say we're being used," the 80-year-old dove told skeptical fellow Laborites in Tel Aviv. "What are they using us for? To bring peace? Should we be embarrassed by that?"

Most political analysts think Peres will want to return to his old role as Israel's foreign minister, adding diplomatic polish to Sharon's unilateralism, which the Palestinians decry as a ploy to duck their demand for all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But the current officeholder, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, has made clear he will not go quietly, and is already leading a group of Likud "rebels" against any alliance with Labor.

Another senior Likudnik, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, insists as a precondition of coalition talks that Peres accept Netanyahu's belt-tightening budgetary policies — a long shot given Labor's recent vocal championing of Israel's economic underclass.

Sharon on Monday threatened the rebels within his party with the prospect of a return to the polls.

"If you don't want this or that, we can go to elections. That's the way it is," Sharon told the Likud's Knesset faction,

referring to the option of a national-unity government. "I am saying this in the clearest possible way: This situation cannot continue."

The prime minister also must plan further ahead, for the likely loss of the NRP from his Cabinet once the Gaza plan gets rolling. According to political sources, on Thursday Sharon is to meet with representatives of Shas and United Torah Judaism with possible offers of coalition seats.

As fervently Orthodox parties — representing, respectively, Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews — Shas and United Torah Judaism historically have demonstrated greater flexibility on territorial concessions than their Zionist religious brethren in the National Union and NRP.

There's a hitch — Sharon's current core coalition partner, the secularist Shinui Party, refuses to sit in a government with the fervently Orthodox.

But Shinui's footing also is unsure, given the implication last week of one of its senior members, Infrastructure Minister Yosef Paritzky, in a bribery conspiracy.

Sharon fired Paritzky, a move that sent shivers through a party once considered Israel's political kingmaker and anti-corruption champion.

Now, Shinui may feel that it, too, is dispensable.

Holocaust museum exhibit explores Nazi 'science'

By JUSTIN BOSCH

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Forced killings are "mercy deaths," the condemned are "research material" and "disinfecting" describes sterilizations, killings and exile.

"Deadly Medicine," a new special exhibit at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, navigates the pseudo-science that underpinned the Holocaust. How Germany, which had been a medical leader early in the 20th century, devolved into an epicenter of bad science is the exhibit's central concern.

"We're trying to help people understand how something like this could evolve," said Arthur Berger, the museum's communications director.

The exhibit abounds with medical instruments, artifacts and records, and explains how science, economics and politics acted as catalysts for the Holocaust.

Science to most would seem a benevolent instrument, but the exhibit shows how science can abet, if not spawn, genocide. The role of science in legitimizing large-scale forced killings, sterilizations and deportations is a contributing factor to the uniqueness of the Holocaust, compared to other repressive and

genocidal regimes, said exhibit curator Susan Bachrach.

The roots of the Nazis' "science" date to the 19th century, when scientists worldwide wondered whether Charles Darwin's "survival of the fittest" theory could be applied to humans. This application — eugenics — sought to improve the human genetic code via selective breeding. A confluence of events in Germany propelled the program from obscurity to a sadistic national movement.

An economic crisis created a pretext for the Nazis to pour resources into filtering the population of those "unfit" elements who were a financial burden, and physicians afforded the development credibility. Significantly, the Nazi Party enjoyed a rate of membership among physicians higher than in most other professions.

"The underlying idea and ideology was that some people were less valuable than others," Bachrach said.

German eugenics eventually cast Jews and others, including blacks and Gypsies, as an economic dredge whose very existence taxed the economy and their compatriots.

"Mercy deaths" first befell disabled infants and children but rapidly expanded to Jews and others deemed undesirable.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

ADL denounces Presbyterian proselytizing

The Anti-Defamation League denounced proselytizing of Jews by the Presbyterian Church USA.

The ADL also called the church's call for divestiture from companies that do business with Israel "offensive and distressing."

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, sent a letter to church leaders Tuesday saying that targeting Jews for conversion to Christianity is insulting, and helped serve as a basis for the Holocaust.

Cameron Kerry meets Sharon, Peres

John Kerry's brother met with Israel's prime minister and opposition leader.

Cameron Kerry, one of the closest advisers to the Massachusetts senator and presumptive Democratic Party nominee for president, is on his first visit to the Jewish state.

"My brother has been here many times and told me of his trips and has a very deep, personal connection to Israel," Kerry told reporters. "I finally had the opportunity to make a visit and I jumped at the chance."

Kerry met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Labor Party leader Shimon Peres on Wednesday. Also planned for his visit — sponsored by an affiliate of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee — is a tour of Israel's West Bank security barrier.

Rubenstein to chair UJC gender initiative

Philanthropist Terry Rubenstein was named chairwoman of the United Jewish Communities' Gender Equity and Organizational Effectiveness Initiative.

Rubenstein, executive vice president of The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds, is treasurer of JTA's board of directors, and is president of the Israel Education Fund of the UJC, the umbrella group for North American Jewish federations.

UJC chairman Robert Goldberg said Rubenstein's appointment was "an important step" to "increase opportunities for female professionals and create an overall climate of gender equity."

WORLD

Brits: John Kerry an important Jew

British Jews consider U.S. presidential contender Sen. John Kerry one of the most important Jews of the 21st century, a new survey says.

The presumptive Democratic nominee for president — who is Catholic but whose grandfather was Jewish — was on a list including director Steven Spielberg, architect Daniel Liebeskind, comedian Jerry Seinfeld and Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks.

A London art gallery and London's Jewish News conducted the survey to mark the sale of an Andy Warhol collection, Ten Portraits of Jews of the 20th Century.

Swiss drop charges against Menem

Swiss authorities suspended a probe related to a bribe former Argentine President Carlos Menem allegedly took to hinder the investigation of the AMIA bombing.

The Swiss Justice Ministry said Tuesday it was suspending an inquiry into money-laundering, citing insufficient evidence, the BBC reported.

Argentina had asked that Switzerland trace \$10 million it said Menem was paid by Iran for agreeing to cover up Iran's role in the bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994, killing 85 people.

Menem, who unsuccessfully ran for president of Argentina last year, now lives in exile in Chile. He has denied all allegations.

MIDEAST

P.A. castigates Roed-Larsen

The Palestinian Authority declared a top U.N. envoy "persona non grata" after he criticized Yasser Arafat.

"Terje Roed-Larsen's statement is not objective. As of today he is an unwelcome person in Palestinian territories," Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a senior adviser to the P.A. president, told Reuters on Wednesday.

In an address Tuesday to the U.N. Security Council, Roed-Larsen, the U.N. special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, assailed Arafat for not stopping Palestinian terrorism.

"The P.A., despite consistent promises by its leadership, has made no progress on its core obligation to take immediate action on the ground to end violence and combat terror and reform and reorganize the Palestinian Authority," he said. "All those who yearn for peace have already and repeatedly argued that President Arafat, in public and in private, take immediate action to restore this diminished credibility."

Israel upbeat on Turkey

Israel said ties with Turkey are strong despite diplomatic differences.

Israeli Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, who was in Ankara on Wednesday, played down recent Turkish government allegations of "state terrorism" by Israel against the Palestinians.

"I don't think Prime Minister Erdogan believes Israel is a terrorist state because he knows Israel is the greatest fighter in the world against terrorism," Olmert said of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"Our basic relations are of two major democracies that have fundamental common interests in our part of the world, which occasionally see some things in a somewhat different way and therefore need more intense and direct contacts," he said.

Turkey is a strategic ally of the Jewish state, but recently the pro-Islamic government has distanced itself from Israel to cultivate ties with the Arab world.

Peres popular as foreign minister

Most Israelis want Labor Party leader Shimon Peres to replace Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, a poll found.

According to a survey published Wednesday by Israel's daily Ma'ariv, 50.6 percent of Israelis want to see Peres back in the Foreign Ministry — a possibility if Labor joins Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government.

In the poll, 32.4 percent of Israelis said they prefer the incumbent foreign minister. Sharon played down talk of a possible change.

Economist: Brighter forecast for Israel

Strong consumer confidence, higher tax revenues and restrained government spending are helping Israel's economic growth.

The Economist magazine raised its economic growth forecast for Israel to 3.4 percent for 2004 and said the aforementioned factors could speed Israel's export-led recovery and push the budget deficit below the 4 percent GDP target, to 3.5 percent.

Gaza arms foundries hit

Israeli helicopter gunships hit arms foundries in the Gaza Strip.

Witnesses said several helicopter-fired missiles wrecked a complex of metal workshops in Gaza City early Wednesday morning, causing heavy damage but no casualties.

Israel described the target as foundries used by Hamas to manufacture Kassam rockets and other arms.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces demolished the homes of two Palestinians overnight.