

IN THE NEWS

Meridor leaving the Jewish Agency

The chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel said he would step down early.

Sallai Meridor, who has served as chairman of the organization since 1999, told Prime Minister Ariel Sharon his resignation would take effect in June. His term was slated to end in June 2006.

An acting chair will be elected at a Jewish Agency board of governors meeting that will take place next month.

Germany dedicates Holocaust memorial

Germany dedicated its new Holocaust memorial.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder joined German Jewish leaders at Tuesday's ceremony in Berlin.

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is a sea of 2,700 cement steles in the heart of Berlin.

Israel remembers its fallen soldiers

Israel honored military personnel who have died in service to the country.

"The lives of the fallen have been stopped in the middle, but they fell so that the life of the State of Israel shall not be cut short," Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said at a Tel Aviv memorial service before the nationwide sounding of sirens Tuesday night to mark the beginning of Remembrance Day.

AIPAC elects new president

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee named Baltimore philanthropist Howard Friedman as its president-elect.

Friedman, a longtime member of the board of the pro-Israel lobby, will assume the presidency in 2006.

Friedman, the president of the board of directors of JTA, will succeed Bernice Manocherian at AIPAC.

WORLD REPORT

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Mere months after peace summit, cease-fire is on verge of collapse

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Just three months after it was ushered in at a peace summit in February, there are growing signs that the cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians may be on the verge of collapse.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of terrorist attacks in the Gaza Strip; there are fears that tensions between Hamas and the Palestinians' ruling Fatah movement could spill over into violence against Israel; and an ongoing spate of mutual recriminations is straining relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

So far the Israel Defense Forces have been showing restraint, even in the face of renewed Palestinian shelling of Israeli civilians. But if there is more shelling, and especially if it causes fatalities, Israel is likely to retaliate, and the situation could spiral out of control.

The cease-fire began well enough. In the immediate aftermath of the summit in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, terrorist attacks tapered off in February and March; there was renewed coordination between Israeli and Palestinian Authority forces and some P.A. success in curbing terrorism, including the uncovering of about 20 weapons-smuggling tunnels on the Egypt-Gaza border.

But in April the trend was reversed. Coordination declined and there was an exponential rise in the number of terrorist attacks. According to IDF figures, in the last week of April alone there were 48 terrorist operations in Gaza, including the firing of Kassam rockets at the Israeli town of Sderot a day after a wanted Palestinian terrorist was killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces.

Because of the upsurge in terrorism and his conviction that the Palestinian Authority is not doing enough to stop it, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon froze moves in early May to release 400 Palestinian prisoners. Sharon said he would release the prisoners only if the Palestinian Authority clamps down on terrorism.

The Palestinians retorted that gestures by Israel, such as releasing the prisoners, would enhance their ability to curb terrorism, and charged that the Israeli government seemed to have no idea how important the prisoner issue is to the Palestinian people as a symbol of their national struggle.

Fatah warned Sharon of dire consequences. Hamas was more explicit: It threatened a return to terrorism.

P.A. Foreign Minister Nasser al-Kidwa sent an urgent message to the diplomatic "Quartet" shepherding the "road map" peace plan — the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia — accusing Sharon of ignoring his Sharm el-Sheik commitment to release prisoners and hand West Bank cities to P.A. control.

After turning two cities over to the Palestinians, Israel froze the handover of three more because the Palestinians ignored the security commitments they undertook as a condition for the handover.

Recent tensions between Fatah and Hamas also threaten the cease-fire. Israeli analysts say a serious falling-out could lead Hamas to attack Israel in defiance of the Fatah-inspired cease-fire.

Indeed, Hamas is threatening to renew violence against Israel on a variety of pretexts: if Fatah tries to overturn recent election re-

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ANALYSIS

■ Cease-fire seems close to collapse as Israeli-Palestinian relationship frays

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sults in Palestinian municipalities, where Hamas made major gains; if Fatah defers legislative elections scheduled for July 17; if Israel targets Hamas operatives; or if Israel doesn't release Palestinian prisoners.

There also are internal differences in Hamas that analysts say could prove destabilizing. Some leading Hamas figures, who would like to see the group do well in legislative elections and become a major political force, have an interest in maintaining the cease-fire, at least for the next few months.

Others, who want to torpedo Israel's planned summer withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank, are seeking to provoke an early end to the lull. Rogue militias, responsible for most of the latest terrorism in Gaza, reportedly are being run by this more militant Hamas wing.

Senior officers in the IDF's Southern Command say these groups plan to step up terror attacks before the withdrawal and make sure it takes place under fire.

That's a nightmare scenario the IDF wants to avoid at all costs, and to avoid it the army has contingency plans for a huge operation in Gaza. Defense sources say it would be similar to Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, when Israel recaptured all Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank in response to massive terrorism.

To shore up the brittle peace process, P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas is calling for an urgent meeting with Sharon.

"There is a need for a meeting between Sharon and me to push the peace process forward," he declared in early May. "We

must discuss implementation of the agreements between us."

Ahead of the proposed meeting, Labor ministers in the Israeli Cabinet urged Sharon to make major gestures to the Palestinians, hoping this would strengthen Abbas' position and give him confidence to clamp down on terrorist groups.

The Labor view has the backing of IDF Military Intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, who, in an unusually outspoken radio interview in early May, declared that what happens on the Palestinian side is not unconnected to what Israel and the United States do.

The inference was clear: Military Intelligence would like to see the government free Palestinian prisoners and hand over more West Bank cities to the Palestinian Authority, moves it believes would help counter rising terrorism.

The Shin Bet security service takes the opposite view. It argues that the Palestinians first must show they are willing to keep prior commitments to fight terrorism, or handing over cities merely will create a breeding ground for more serious violence.

Sharon, so far, is listening to the Shin Bet. He told the Cabinet on Sunday that he was being pressed to bolster Abbas,

but that he couldn't do that "at the cost of Israeli lives."

Indeed, Sharon believes that holding back the transfer of cities and the release of prisoners can serve as a lever to pressure the Palestinians to act against terrorism.

The clash between Sharon and the Shin Bet on one side, and the Labor ministers and Military Intelligence on the other, highlights the Israeli dilemma: Can Israel induce the Palestinians to fight terrorism

by playing tough or by making gestures?

So far, neither approach has worked in the dozen years since the Oslo process began. Toughness makes the Palestinians defiant, while concessions are pocketed but then derided as insufficient.

In the meantime, the situation on the ground seems to be creating a potentially explosive vicious circle: Israel makes concessions but the Palestinians do not fight terrorism seriously; as a result Israel cancels additional gestures; this is said to weaken Abbas' position, leading to even less Palestinian action against terrorism; and eventually the peace process breaks down.

How to break the cycle will top the agenda if, as seems likely, Sharon and Abbas meet soon.

'There is a need for a meeting between Sharon and me to push the peace process forward.'

Mahmoud Abbas
Palestinian Authority President

Stamps honor Jewish scientist, lyricist

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The U.S. Postal Service is issuing commemorative stamps this month honoring a brilliant 20th-century Jewish scientist, physicist Richard Feynman, and a stellar Jewish lyricist, E.Y. "Yip" Harburg.

Feynman, a free-spirited scientist, musician, linguist and bon vivant, shared the 1965 Nobel Prize in physics for his contributions to quantum electrodynamics.

A native of Far Rockaway, N.Y., Feynman helped develop the atomic bomb during World War II while still in his 20s.

Feynman died in 1988 at 69. He was the subject of the movie "Infinity" and the play "QED."

The four-stamp set in the postal

American Scientist series also includes mathematician John von Neumann, who was born Jewish but converted to Catholicism, geneticist Barbara McClintock and thermodynamicist Josiah Willard Gibbs.

Harburg is being honored in a separate series of stamps.

Born on New York City's Lower East Side to Russian Jewish immigrant parents, Harburg is best known for his lyrics to "Cabin in the Sky," "Bloomer Girl," "The Wizard of Oz" and "Finian's Rainbow." Among his most memorable songs are "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" "April in Paris" and "It's Only a Paper Moon."

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Allegations of intolerance in Air Force academy

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Pentagon is investigating allegations that staff and cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy are creating a climate that is unwelcoming to Jews and other religious minorities.

A report late last month by Americans United for Separation of Church and State — which detailed reported evangelical comments from academy leaders and incidents in which cadets claimed they were pressured to attend church services — prompted the Defense Department to create a task force to assess the school's climate and offer ideas for changes within the next few weeks.

The new accusations come just months after the Colorado Springs academy instituted a program aimed at teaching tolerance to cadets and staff.

The report said Jews and others who celebrate the Sabbath on Saturdays were not granted special passes to leave academy grounds, while those who sought passes for Sunday services got them.

Some other charges involve slurs against Jewish cadets, including one in which a Jewish cadet reportedly was told the Holocaust was revenge for the death of Jesus.

"Religious tolerance issues have been around for a long time in some form or another," Bruce DeBoskey, the Anti-Defamation League's Mountain States regional director, said of the academy. "There's always been a sense by some people that the atmosphere there is not particularly inclusive."

Military academies are government operations and must follow the government's strict separation of church and state, said Barry Lynn, Americans United's executive director.

"They have a responsibility to make sure there is nothing that constitutes a pattern of harassment against people of minority religious faiths or no religious faith," Lynn said.

But Lynn and DeBoskey said the concern goes beyond that.

"The Air Force Academy trains the officers of tomorrow," DeBoskey said. "If they are being taught it's OK to use their power to proselytize, the military will not be a welcoming place and possibly will pose constitutional problems."

In a separate interview, Lynn said it's

especially important for the military to be a religiously tolerant place as it fights a war against militant Islam.

"You don't want the Islamic world to think it's a mission of the Air Force to convert religious minorities," he said. "It's a very dangerous time for this attitude to become part of the story."

A spokesman for the academy, Meade Warthen, said the Defense Department task force was scheduled to come to view the campus on Tuesday, and likely would issue a report to the acting secretary of the Air Force by month's end.

Warthen said the school had no comment beyond supporting the task force's work. "Were going to allow them to conduct it before we provide any specific information," he said.

The Air Force Academy has been under fire in recent years, with nearly 150 female cadets claiming they suffered sexual assaults.

DeBoskey said he has heard complaints of evangelical commentary by Air Force leaders and taunts from cadets. In addition, DeBoskey said some school events have been planned with no regard to Jewish holidays.

The Air Force Academy has approximately 57 Jews out of 4,200 cadets, according to October 2004 figures from Hillel: The

Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which does not have a branch at the academy.

The ADL has offered the academy its assistance on diversity and religious tolerance training, similar to the programs the ADL conducts for law enforcement personnel. The group says it hasn't yet received an answer to its offer.

In March, after survey results last year showed religious bias on campus, the academy began a program called "Respecting the Spiritual Values of All People." The program was developed with help from Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, a former U.S. Navy chaplain.

Resnicoff told JTA in an e-mail that he preferred

not to comment on the issue, "other than to say that I know from firsthand conversations that it is not humanly possible" for Air Force personnel "to be taking this matter any more seriously than they are."

But Lynn said the program has not been working, and time allotted for it has been cut back from the original plans. He said his organization spoke with 15 cadets for its report, and has received more than 50 calls from current and former students since the report was released.

Lynn said there have been few similar reports about the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. Jewish leaders have praised both schools for their religious diversity and tolerance.

Religious tolerance issues have been around for a long time in some form or another.'

Bruce DeBoskey
Anti-Defamation League

**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

Children's prayer book released

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — The Reconstructionist movement will release an illustrated children's prayer book this summer.

The 96-page book is designed for use by 5- to 9-year-olds and their grandparents. "Siddur Kol Hano'ar: Voice of Children" includes folklore, stories from Jewish sources and questions posed for young readers in an effort to "capture their innate prayerfulness" and "encourage dialogue" about the meaning of prayer, according to Rabbi Sandy Sasso of Congregation Beth-El Zedek in Indianapolis.

Sasso, the first Reconstructionist woman rabbi, co-wrote the book with education consultant Rabbi Jeffrey Schein.

The siddur initially was funded by an anonymous donation, which was augmented with gifts from grandparents in many Reconstructionist congregations.

It is being released in two editions, one with English transliteration and one without, with the hope that it will appeal to congregations outside the movement.

Published by the Reconstructionist Press, it will be available in late August. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Doran to head Mideast NSC desk

The White House will name Michael Doran to head Israeli-Palestinian affairs on the National Security Council, JTA has learned.

Doran is a Near Eastern studies professor at Princeton University who has drawn criticism for advocating for democratic reform in the Middle East.

He has written several articles in the journal "Foreign Affairs" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other Middle East topics.

He will replace Elliott Abrams, who was promoted this year to deputy national security adviser for global democratic strategy.

Hadassah gets new leader

Hadassah named a new national executive director.

Morlie Hammer Levin, who recently was vice president for strategic donor initiatives at Los Angeles' Jewish federation, will take over in the top professional slot at Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, in early September.

Toronto film fest highlights Israeli flicks

Fourteen films from Israel highlight this year's Toronto Jewish Film Festival. The festival, which opened over the weekend, runs through May 15.

Organizers say the 13-year-old festival is now the world's largest Jewish film festival.

Web site honors U.S. Jewish history

The Center for Jewish History launched a Web site devoted to 350 years of American Jewry.

The site, www.jewisinamerica.org, features images from the collections of the groups and museums that make up the New York City center.

The center is opening an exhibit on American Jewish history that will run from May 17 to Sept. 15.

Send a salami to your soldier in the army

A Jewish deli in New Jersey is sending salamis to U.S. troops in Iraq.

Operation Salami Drop is being run by Marc and Michael Brummer, co-owners of the Newark-based Hobby's Deli.

The Brummers plan to send 23,000 salamis, one for each soldier in the 42nd infantry division posted to Tikrit, Iraq.

WORLD

Russian synagogue burns down

A historic wooden synagogue near Moscow was destroyed by fire. Local Jews say Tuesday's incident may have been an arson attack. The synagogue was located in the village of Malachovka, some 40 miles east of Moscow.

Chirac honors survivor

French President Jacques Chirac honored an Auschwitz survivor as part of ceremonies marking the end of World War II in Europe.

Henry Bulkawko was named grand officer of the Legion d'Honneur on Sunday. Bulkawko, 86, was deported to Auschwitz in 1942 and today is president of the Union of Deportees to Auschwitz and vice president of CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular French Jewish organizations.

Meet him in Jerusalem

A teenager from St. Louis won the annual Diaspora Bible Quiz in Israel. Ben "Chaim" Kandel, 17, was awarded a scholarship to the Jerusalem College of Technology. Sixty-five teenagers from 35 countries participated in the event.

MIDDLE EAST

Mofaz firm on withdrawals

Israel will leave the Gaza Strip even if Hamas does well in Palestinian Authority elections, its defense minister said.

"The disengagement will not be canceled," Shaul Mofaz told Army Radio on Tuesday. "It is true that Hamas has been strengthened, but I think we must make enormous efforts to implement the disengagement plan, because ultimately it is important for the State of Israel."

Mofaz spoke after Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom warned Monday that a Hamas victory in P.A. legislative elections slated for July could prompt Israel to call off its withdrawals from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

In the name of the son

A Palestinian whose Jewish son served in the Israeli army reportedly took up residency in Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported Tuesday that Adel Hussein, who had a son, Muhammad, with an Israeli Jew, had been granted permanent resident status.

Muhammad, who was raised as a Jew under the name Yossi Peretz in southern Israel, served as a combat soldier during the intifada.

Estranged from Muhammad's mother, Adel Hussein fled the West Bank after receiving death threats from Palestinian militias.

Israel's Interior Ministry did not immediately confirm that Hussein had received residency status.

Terrorists to lose status

Israel plans to revoke the Jerusalem residency permits of four Palestinian terrorists.

Interior Minister Ofir Pines-Paz on Tuesday notified the so-called Silwan Cell, whose members are serving life sentences in jail, that their right to live in Israel would be revoked.

Israel population at 6.9 million

Israel's population stands at 6.9 million. According to Central Bureau of Statistics census figures published Tuesday, before Independence Day, 5.5 million Israelis are listed as Jews and the rest — 20 percent of the population — as Arabs.

But the first category includes around 300,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union who are not Jewish under rabbinical law.

Islamic Jihad kills 'collaborator'

Islamic Jihad killed a Palestinian teenager suspected of "collaborating" with Israel.

The body of Rami Al-Malakh, 18, was found near the West Bank city of Tulkarm on Saturday. He was shot to death.

He was from the same village where Israeli soldiers killed a member of Islamic Jihad recently, the Associated Press reported.

Ex-chief rabbi pressed

Israel's Conservative movement called on a former Ashkenazi chief rabbi to reach out to non-Orthodox movements in the Jewish state.

Rabbi Reuven Hammer, head of the Conservative, or Masorti, Rabbinical Court for Conversion in Israel, wrote an open letter to Yisrael Meir Lau that was released Tuesday.

The letter said that since Lau was being granted the Israel Prize for his achievements, including building bridges between secular and religious Jews in Israel and between Israelis and Diaspora Jews, he should retract support for a statement made by the Rabbinical Council during his tenure that said the Orthodox establishment in Israel should not coordinate conversion efforts with the Conservative and Reform movements.