

IN THE NEWS

Shalom: Contacts stronger than ever

The "iron wall" separating Israel and the Arab world is falling, Israel's foreign minister told the U.N. General Assembly.

"Israel's contacts with Arab and Muslim states are growing at a rate never seen before," Silvan Shalom said Tuesday, noting that he had met with representatives of more than 10 Arab and Muslim countries over the last week in New York.

"Contacts between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors are good for the region and good for peace."

Groups press Bush on killings in Sudan

In an ad in The New York Times, Jewish groups called on President Bush to intensify efforts to end the killings in Sudan.

In the advertisement organized by the American Jewish World Service that ran Tuesday, Jewish leaders from across the religious and communal spectrum called on Bush to work to expand peacekeeping operations and provide additional support to African soldiers in Darfur, the region where government-sponsored militias have killed tens of thousands of people.

Arrest linked to Jewish school

A top former U.S. official under arrest for allegedly lying about his relationship with a Jewish lobbyist is accused of using his influence to procure government land for a Jewish school.

U.S. agents arrested David Safavian on Monday, three days after he abruptly quit his position as top procurer for the Bush administration.

He was arrested for allegedly lying to investigators and obstructing a federal investigation into Jack Abramoff, a Jewish lobbyist who is suspected of cheating Native American clients out of millions of dollars.

WORLD REPORT

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Simon Wiesenthal dies at age 96, called 'conscience of the Holocaust'

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA) — Simon Wiesenthal, who died in Vienna on Tuesday at age 96, often was called the "conscience of the Holocaust."

The legendary Nazi-hunter, who lost 89 members of his and his wife's families in the Shoah, spent more than half a century collecting information on Nazi war criminals so they could be called to account for their crimes.

"Simon Wiesenthal showed the world what one person determined to do the right thing can accomplish," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, whose mission is to combat anti-Semitism and track down remaining Nazi criminals.

"His wife once told him that he wasn't just married to her, he was married to the 6 million," Hier said, "and in a way, she was right."

Working with a small staff from a cramped office in Vienna, Wiesenthal sifted through tens of thousands of documents and followed countless leads, compiling archives on Nazi criminals.

But Wiesenthal didn't personally track down Nazis the way the world thinks he did, experts on the issue say.

"I don't think he worked as a Nazi hunter as the Hollywood image would like it to be the case," said Tom Segev, an Israeli historian and columnist for Ha'aretz. "He cultivated that myth because it gave a lot of weight to himself as a symbol, and also to his work."

Wiesenthal's importance "is not that he hunted down Nazis, but that he made a very important contribution to the culture of

memory and in the fight against anti-Semitism," said Segev, author of "The Seventh Million," an examination of the role the Holocaust played in the early years of the State of Israel.

Wiesenthal, who was liberated from Mauthausen in 1945, said his work stemmed from what many call "survivor's guilt."

"Justice Not Vengeance" — the title of his 1989 autobiography — served as Wiesenthal's motto and guiding principle.

"Survival is a privilege which entails obligations," he wrote.

"I am forever asking myself what I can do for those who have not survived. The answer I have found for myself (and which need not necessarily be the answer for every survivor) is: I want to be their mouthpiece, I want to keep their memory alive, to make sure the dead live on in that memory."

Wiesenthal began gathering and preparing evidence on Nazi atrocities for the U.S. Army's War Crimes Section immediately after World War II.

Encouraged by Israeli agents' capture in 1960 of Adolf Eichmann, the Gestapo technocrat who had supervised implementation of the Nazis' "Final Solution," Wiesenthal opened his Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna and devoted his life to hunting war criminals. An architect by training, at first he had few financial resources or political allies in his Nazi-hunting work.

Despite the popular perception, experts say Wiesenthal was not instrumental in tracking down Eichmann. Israel executed Eichmann in 1961 after convicting him of war crimes.

"He deserves no credit whatsoever for

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OBITUARY

■ Wiesenthal helped make Nazi-hunting a worldwide issue

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Eichmann's capture," Efraim Zuroff of the Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office told Israel Radio. "People credited him for successes that were not his, and, let's say, he did not rush to correct them. But there is no doubt that this person led the efforts and became a symbol. He is one of the few Jewish heroes out there."

According to the center's Web site, in 1953 Wiesenthal passed information to Israeli officials regarding Eichmann's whereabouts in Argentina, at a time when the FBI believed Eichmann was in Syria.

High-profile fugitives that Wiesenthal did help find were Karl Silberbauer, the Gestapo officer who arrested Anne Frank; and Franz Stangl, commandant of the Treblinka and Sobibor concentration camps in Poland, according to the center's Web site.

He also spoke out loudly over the decades against neo-Nazism and racism.

"The only value of nearly five decades of my work is a warning to the murderers of tomorrow that they will never rest," he said in 1994.

Wiesenthal's prominent public stand sparked threats, hate-mail and even a bomb on his doorstep, set by neo-Nazis in 1982.

"He took the Holocaust out of its Jewish limitations and made it a source of energy in the universal struggle against racism and for human rights," Segev said. "That's probably more important than his role in locating Nazi criminals."

In 2003, in frail health, Wiesenthal said his work was complete.

"I found the mass murderers I was look-

ing for, and I have outlived all of them," he told an Austrian magazine. "If there's a few I didn't look for, they are now too old and fragile to stand trial. My work is done."

The center that bears his name continues to search for World War II criminals; it currently operates the Operation Last Chance program, which offers rewards for information on those suspected of Nazi-era crimes.

The long list of awards and honors Wiesenthal received testifies to the power and importance of his battle.

"Mr. Wiesenthal has been untiring in his service to the Jewish communities in the U.K. and elsewhere by helping to right at least some of the awful wrongs of the Holocaust," Foreign Minister Jack Straw said when Great Britain awarded Wiesenthal an honorary knighthood last year. "If there is one name which symbolizes this vital coming to terms with the past, it is Simon Wiesenthal's."

"The extraordinary thing about Simon Wiesenthal is how little help he had, and how few resources, just a long memory and tremendous determination," Britain's ambassador to Austria, John Macgregor, told JTA.

Wiesenthal was born on New Year's Eve, 1908, in the town of Buczacz, now in Ukraine. He married Cyla Mueller in 1936 and worked in an architectural office in Lvov.

After suffering under anti-Jewish

purges following the non-aggression pact signed between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in 1939, Wiesenthal and his wife barely survived the Nazi Holocaust.

Cyla was able to elude death or capture by masquerading as a Polish Catholic. Simon was held in a series of labor and death camps. When an American armored unit liberated him from Mauthausen on May 5, 1945, he weighed less than 100 pounds.

Both he and Cyla thought the other was

dead. They were reunited later in 1945 and remained a devoted couple until Cyla's death in 2003.

Tributes to Wiesenthal poured in Tuesday from world leaders and others.

Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski issued a statement praising Wiesenthal as "a man who did a huge service for the world's modern history."

"Simon Wiesenthal and the institute he created played an absolutely vital role in showing the mechanisms of the Holocaust, pointing to those guilty of this genocide," Kwasniewski said. "I hope that this message will be universally accepted by politicians, societies and not just in the context of the Holocaust, but all crimes against human rights which take place in the modern world."

(JTA Foreign Editor Peter Ephross in New York and correspondent Dan Baron in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

'He took the Holocaust out of its Jewish limitations and made it a source of energy in the universal struggle against racism and for human rights.'

Tom Segev

Israeli historian and Ha'aretz columnist

Jews angry with D.C. baseball team

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Washington Nationals suspended the credentials of a minister who counseled players that Jews were going to hell.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld met Tuesday with Nationals President Tony Tavares after the Washington Post reported that outfielder Ryan Church was told by a minister that his Jewish former girlfriend was going to hell.

Jon Moeller, a representative from Baseball Chapel, has been temporarily denied access to team facilities, and the team is asking Moeller and Baseball Chapel to dis-

associate themselves from the comments.

"What happened in the locker room was hatred," said Herzfeld, rabbi at The National Synagogue. "Everyone's allowed to believe what they want, but the moment that hatred comes into the locker room, it's a source of divisiveness."

In a statement, Church said he hopes the comments attributed to him — that he learned from Moeller that "other religions don't know any better. It's up to us to spread the word" — did not offend anyone. Moeller and representatives from Baseball Chapel were unavailable for comment. ■



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German Jews say they'll work with either party

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — German Jewish leader Paul Spiegel looks forward to working with Germany's next chancellor — whoever that may be.

Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, applauded both the incumbent Social Democratic Party and the challenging Christian Democratic Party at the close of an election Sunday that was so tight that it might have to be held again. As the secular body representing Jews in Germany, the Central Council must work closely with whichever administration is at hand.

With the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats both claiming victory, Spiegel said the Jewish community can't lose either way: Both parties applaud the growth of Jewish life in Germany and support strong ties with the United States and Israel, even if they oppose the war in Iraq.

For many Jews in Germany, the pro-U.S. and pro-Israel stances offer reassurance of Germany's strength as a democracy.

But Germany's economic woes are of great concern, said Deidre Berger, head of the American Jewish Committee office in Berlin.

"While this election seemed inconclusive, it did make clear that for many voters reform was the main issue," Berger told JTA. "The tremendous last-minute gains of the Social Democrats demonstrated that there is a commitment among many voters to continuing the badly needed social and economic reforms in Germany."

"From a Jewish perspective, it seems important that a coalition solution be found that creates a stable foundation for further reforms," she added. "We also hope that potential coalitions will consider integrating a commitment to combating anti-Semitism within their coalition platform."

German Jewish journalist Richard Chaim Schneider said the question is not whether the new government is good or bad for the Jews, but whether it will be able to make significant progress on the country's main problems within the next four years.

"If there's no light at the end of the tunnel the fringes will be strengthened,

left and right equally," Schneider told JTA. "Then it will be bad for every minority in Germany, most of all Turks and other foreigners."

Conversations with German Jews indicated that most voted for parties on the left — the Social Democrats or their coalition partners, the Green Party — while few voted for the Christian Democrats.

In general, they said, they appreciated the economic and social reforms Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has begun implementing, his support for Jew-

ish immigration and the strong backing for Israel shown by both Schroeder and his foreign minister, Joschka Fischer of the Greens.

Uriel, a Jewish man in his late 20s, voted for the Social Democrats on the local level and the Greens at the national level.

This governing coalition "has started difficult economic reforms that the previous government of [former Chancellor] Helmut Kohl had put off for way too long. The current government has more or less accepted that Germany is a nation of immigration," he said. He added, "I support the Mideast politics of Fischer and believe that the health and pension reforms as well as liberalization of gay marriage represent a step in the right direction."

Esther, a woman in her 30s, said she voted for the Social Democrats because she believes the party is more committed to social causes and because of what she considers Schroeder's "remarkable" opposition to the war in Iraq.

"The economy is not the only answer to problems," she said. "I think generosity, culture and social-minded thinking are the basis for the moral survival of every society."

Irene Runge, head of the independent Jewish Cultural Association in the former East Berlin, wrote that Jewish voters in Germany reflect the country's

mainstream political spectrum, but that most Jews in Germany can't vote because they're not yet citizens.

There are some 106,000 Jews in Germany today, a fourfold increase since 1990 due to immigration from the former Soviet Union.

For Spiegel, a clear sign that Jews should be living in Germany was the contract he signed in 2003 with Schroeder, which placed the Jewish community on the same legal level with the Protestant and Catholic churches.

"That's an historic achievement," Spiegel said.

But Spiegel also respects the party of challenger Angela Merkel, the East German-born protege of Kohl, the former chancellor.

"I have complete confidence that" Merkel's Christian Democratic Party "pursues a correct political course for this country," Spiegel said. "I have problems with some politicians, but never with the party itself."

In 2003, Merkel was slow to distance the party from Martin Hohmann, a party member who referred to Jews as a "nation of perpetrators" because of the role some Jews played in the Russian Revolution. The comments were made in the context of efforts to deflect ordinary Germans' responsibility for the actions of the Nazis.

The Central Council tried to sue Hohmann, but the courts determined that his remarks were not a statutory offense.

Spiegel has had his differences with Schroeder, too, particularly Schroeder's blanket opposition to the Iraq war.

"The concentration camps were not liberated by peace demonstrations, but by the Red Army," Spiegel said.

The mainstream parties now are competing to form coalitions with smaller parties so they can lay final claim to the election victory. Both have ruled out cooperation with the new left-wing party, leaving the free-market Free Democratic Party and the Green Party up for grabs.

'From a Jewish perspective, it seems important that a coalition solution be found that creates a stable foundation for further reforms.'

Deidre Berger

American Jewish Committee

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

'Quartet' to P.A.: Disarm terrorists

The "Quartet" called on the Palestinian Authority to disarm terrorist groups.

"While the P.A. leadership has condemned violence and has sought to encourage Palestinian groups who have engaged in terrorism to abandon this course and engage in the democratic process, the Quartet further urges the Palestinian Authority to maintain law and order and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure," the group said Tuesday in a statement after its representatives met in New York.

In its statement, the Quartet also committed to disbursing \$750 million to the Palestinian Authority in the coming year.

France honors AJCommittee's Harris

The American Jewish Committee's executive director was awarded France's Legion of Honor.

David Harris received the award Sunday from France's Foreign Minister, Phillipe Douste-Blazy, who made the presentation on behalf of President Jacques Chirac.

"You are an indefatigable man and defender of democracy," Douste-Blazy said of Harris. "Your fight against all forms of intolerance serves human dignity, as well as interethnic and interreligious dialogue."

MIDDLE EAST

Qatari criticizes Arabs on Israel

Some Arab leaders went too far in saying they would never make peace with Israel, the Qatari foreign minister said.

"The Arabs — some of them — they went too far with their people that they would not talk with the enemy by any way," Sheik Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani said last week. "And I think this is, again, wrong policy. There are no enemies and no friends, but there is always not only responsibilities, but interests."

Israel has maintained a trade mission in Qatar since 1996.

Al-Thani, in New York for the launch of this year's U.N. General Assembly, was addressing the Council on Foreign Relations.

He also met on the sidelines of the U.N. assembly with his Israeli counterpart, Silvan Shalom.

Sharon ready for Likud fight

Ariel Sharon denied reports that he plans to quit Israel's ruling Likud Party.

Addressing supporters Tuesday, the Israeli prime minister said he will run in the next primary despite having lost hard-line Likud support over the recent Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Stiff opposition within the party, especially from former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has stirred speculation that Sharon could form a centrist bloc with Labor leader Shimon Peres and Shinui leader Yosef Lapid.

That option remains open if Sharon loses the Likud helm to Netanyahu.

Reform rabbi wants recognition

A Reform rabbi asked Israel's top court to recognize that she is her community's chaplain of choice.

Backed by the Israel Religious Action Center, Miri Gold petitioned the High Court of Justice on Tuesday to order the state to grant her the same endorsement accorded to Orthodox rabbis.

Gold is rabbi of the Israeli community of Gezer, but she isn't eligible for chaplaincy benefits because of the Orthodox rabbinate's hegemony over religious issues in the Jewish state. She accused the state of religious and gender discrimination.

No date was set for a ruling.

Sharon's N.Y. meeting questioned

Israel's attorney general is investigating a report that Ariel Sharon may have received illicit foreign campaign funding.

The Justice Ministry said Tuesday that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz would look into the Channel 10 television report that the prime minister met over the weekend with American Jewish backers who donated money for his race in an upcoming Likud Party primary.

According to Channel 10, participants in Sunday night's meeting with Sharon in New York were asked to pay \$10,000 per couple — more than the sum permitted for foreign contributions to Israeli political campaigns. Sharon confidants denied any wrongdoing on his part.

Ethiopians strike to go to Israel

Hundreds of Falash Mura in Ethiopia went on a hunger strike, demanding to be taken to Israel.

The protesters, numbering as many as 1,000, declared Tuesday that they would fast for three days in Addis Ababa to force Israel to make good on a Knesset decision to speed their immigration.

Israeli officials said every effort is being made to expedite the immigration of the 20,000 or so Falash Mura remaining in Ethiopia.

The Falash Mura are descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity but have since returned to their Jewish roots.

Withdrawals ending in West Bank

Israel removed its last troops from two evacuated West Bank settlements.

Palestinians poured into Sa-Nur and Homesh this week after the Israeli garrisons there were withdrawn.

Troops remain in Ganim and Kadim, two other settlements in the northern West Bank emptied of residents last month in parallel with the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

NORTH AMERICA

O.U. attacks Kennedy on Katrina vouchers

The Orthodox Union denounced Sen. Edward Kennedy for his opposition to a Bush administration proposal to use hurricane relief money for parochial schools.

The administration has proposed giving public schools upended by Hurricane Katrina \$1.86 billion, while another \$488 million would go to families whose children attend private and parochial schools.

But Kennedy, the influential Massachusetts Democrat, dismissed the idea as an end-run around congressional opposition to President Bush's school vouchers program.

Rabbis push Congress on torture

A liberal rabbinical group cited a landmark Israeli ruling banning torture in urging the U.S. Congress to stamp out the practice.

Rabbis for Human Rights cited the 1999 Israeli Supreme Court ruling in a letter the group presented Wednesday to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who has led congressional efforts to ensure that U.S. troops do not torture captives.

Program encourages grants to Jewish education

A program is offering matching grants to encourage philanthropists to invest in Jewish education.

The Jewish Funders Network, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education and five philanthropists will match first-time gifts of \$25,000 to \$100,000 at a rate of 50 percent.

The program is an outgrowth of one by the funders network and the Avi Chai Foundation that raised \$6.8 million for Jewish education.

More information is available at www.dayschoolmatch.org.