

## IN THE NEWS

## Sharon suffers a minor stroke

Ariel Sharon was hospitalized after suffering a light stroke.

The Israeli prime minister was traveling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv on Sunday evening when he said he felt ill, Israeli media reported.

He was admitted to the trauma ward of Hadassah-Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem.

Reports quoted the hospital as saying Sharon was not in danger and that he was undergoing tests.

## Iran pushes Holocaust denial

Iran said its Holocaust denial should be tolerated.

"Westerners are used to leading a monologue but they should learn to listen to different views," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said Sunday, defending recent remarks by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denying the Nazi genocide of Jews took place. "What the president said is an academic issue. The West's reaction shows their continued support for Zionists," Asefi said.

Ahmadinejad's comments drew international condemnations, including one from the U.N. Security Council.

## Israel glad at warning on Hamas

Israel welcomed the U.S. warning against Hamas joining the Palestinian Authority.

Ron Prozor, director general of the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, said Sunday that the congressional move could push the Palestinian Authority to take a stronger stance against Hamas.

In a 397-17 vote, lawmakers called on the Palestinian Authority to bar the Islamic terrorist group from running in the Jan. 25 parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Authority officials rejected the resolution, which potentially could spell a reduction in or end of U.S. aid.



# WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

## Nearly two months after Wilma, Florida's elderly Jews digging out

By LARRY LUXNER

**B**OCA RATON, Fla. (JTA) — Compared to the horrors Hanna Platt lived through during the Holocaust — she lost a lung following a particularly severe beating at Auschwitz — Hurricane Wilma and its aftermath were a breeze.

Even so, the slight woman of 78 said, things were pretty bad at Century Village, the sprawling retirement community in Boca Raton, Fla., where she has lived since 1983.

"We were without electricity for eight days," Platt recalled. "Ham I don't eat, since I keep kosher. So for the first couple of days, I couldn't eat anything. Finally, when the kosher food came, I was already too weak to go and pick it up. So the girls delivered me chicken."

The "girls" Platt affectionately refers to are volunteers with Ruth Rales Jewish Family Service, a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County.

The agency moved into high gear in the days after Oct. 24, when Hurricane Wilma pounded the area with 100-mph winds and severe flooding, leaving millions of South Florida residents without running water, electricity or telephone service for days.

Some of the worst damage was seen in the heavily Jewish city of Boca Raton, which suffered its first direct hit from a hurricane in 55 years.

At both Century Village and Kings Point — a large retirement community in Delray Beach — roofs were blown off buildings and rains poured in, soaking carpets, furniture, walls and personal possessions.

Chabad of West Boca was among the many Jewish organizations providing relief once the storm had passed, the congregation's rebbetzin, Chani Bukiet, said.

"We were able to get ready-to-eat meals from Chabad headquarters in New York," Bukiet said. "The Chabad rebbetzin in Coconut Creek got together with all the various Chabads around and we took the food to various communities in the area."

Nine weeks after the storm, several hundred elderly Jews in the southern Palm Beach County area are still living in temporary housing such as FEMA shelters, trailers or with friends, Jewish Family Services executive director Jaclynn Faffer said.

"We were the first agency to hit the ground running the day after Wilma," she told JTA. "The Area Agency on Aging sort of asked us to be the coordinating agency. We formed a partnership between them, the Palm Beach Sheriff's Department and our elected officials. We literally went door to door, delivering food and ice, making sure people had their medical needs attended to."

Added Anne Chernin, the agency's director of community relations and government affairs: "The reality is that in the aftermath of Wilma, many apartments were damaged and had to be condemned. But FEMA," the Federal Emergency Management Agency, "and the insurance companies have created such a bureaucracy, basically bullying the seniors and taking advantage of them."

She said Jewish Family Services still has caseworkers going door-to-door at Century Village and Kings Point, helping people fill

*Continued on page 2*

**FOCUS ON ISSUES**

## Florida's elderly Jewish community finds it difficult to recover from Hurricane Wilma

*Continued from page 1*

out applications for government assistance.

"The problem is that much of what's done today is done online, but only 10 percent of seniors are computer literate," Chernin said. "It's one thing to have a computer and check your e-mail; it's a whole other thing to fill out forms online. They've put up a number of roadblocks for seniors."

Chernin said the family services agency will head a task force meeting in early January that will address many of these issues and develop a plan for future disasters.

"We know that, in all likelihood, there will be more hurricanes — and our goal is to be better prepared and have a better, more coordinated approach," she said.

The agency also is trying to publicize its 10-year-old CareLink program for Jewish residents aged 75 or older — like Platt, whose two daughters live in New York and California.

The agency expects demand for the program to pick up significantly.

"CareLink allows adult children up north to contact us, and we can work with them to check up on their parents," Faffer said.

"So we become the surrogate children. We accompany them to doctor's appointments and do formal monthly reports. There's constant e-mail contact between us and the adult children.

"We're trying to publicize this program up north so that people know about us before an emergency occurs," she said.

The family services agency charges its clients \$350 for an initial evaluation, then a \$100 hourly rate for services rendered.

This includes sending someone to visit twice a week to make sure elderly parents are eating properly.

"We can hook them up with a home health-care agency that gives them a preferred rate," Faffer said. "They sign a contract, which says we'll keep an eye out on the parents, get them involved in any one of our many programs, most of which are free, so at least they have some social support.

"A lot of private companies do this for a lot more money. We don't even break even on the program," said Faffer, adding that as the Jewish population gets older and older, "there's going to be more and more of a need for this."

In fact, a soon-to-be-released demographic study shows that, while the me-

dian age of Jews in southern Palm Beach County is 71, only 9 percent of them have adult children also living in the county, while another 12 percent have an adult child living elsewhere in South Florida.

"After the hurricane, we had one woman drive up to our agency with her 90-year-old mother in the back seat, saying she needed a place to put her," Faffer said. "The daughter lived in

Boca Raton and still had electricity and plenty of room, but didn't want to take her mother in."

"It's not unusual for us to get a call from an adult child who's just moved his mom or dad, or both, into an apartment at Kings Point," she said. "Then they call us as they're about to fly back north and say, 'Take care of them.' They just dump their parents here. It's not the majority, but it happens more than you can imagine." ■

**The problem is that much of what's done today is online, but only 10 percent of seniors are computer literate.**

**Anne Chernin**  
Helping with Wilma relief

## Israeli Arab lawmaker blasts Zionism

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli Arab lawmaker said he would never recognize the Jewish state.

"Israel was the biggest daylight robbery of the 20th century. I will never recognize Zionism, even if all the Arabs do so. We will not give up on Palestine, Azmi Beshara was quoted as saying over the weekend by the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir.

Beshara, who traveled to Lebanon without the required Israeli government approval, heads the National Democratic Assembly, a predominantly Arab politi-

cal party in the Israeli Knesset.

"The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is not a demographic conflict, but a national conflict," he was quoted as saying. "We are the original residents of Palestine, not those who came from Poland or Russia."

Beshara, who was speaking at a book fair in Beirut, made a rhetorical demand of Israel's Jews: "Return Palestine to us and take your democracy. We the Arabs are not interested in it." There was no immediate reaction from the Israeli government to the remarks. ■

## Holocaust museum architect dies

NEW YORK (JTA) — James Ingo Freed, the architect who designed the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, died Dec. 15 at 75.

Freed's design for the museum in Washington won acclaim for its ability to

evoke the horrors of the Nazi genocide.

Freed himself credited the project with helping him get in touch with his Jewish heritage.

Born in 1930 in Germany, he later fled Nazi Germany with his family. ■

**JTA**  
WORLD  
REPORT

**Daniel J. Krifcher**  
President

**Mark J. Joffe**  
Executive Editor and Publisher

**Lisa Hostein**  
Editor

**Michael S. Arnold**  
Managing Editor

**Lenore A. Silverstein**  
Finance and Administration Director

**Noa Artzi-Weill**  
Marketing Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

# Nazi-era boxcar to go on display in Houston

By TOBY AXELROD

BLANKENBURG, Germany (JTA) — On a half-gray day in the Harz Mountains, the huge doors of a railway restoration workshop were flung open, letting in cold air.

Slowly, on tracks that cross the threshold, a small engine emerged, pulling a large boxcar. Engineer Thomas Herbst leaned out the engine's cabin, watching the car's rounded top clear the doorway.

Peter Spehr observed from the sidelines, camera in hand.

The scene marked the end of a months-long project over which he presided: restoration of this 1942 freight car, a type used to haul Jews from across Europe to death camps.

The car's destination now is the Holocaust Museum Houston: As of March 5, 2006, it will be accessible to visitors, symbolizing the penultimate step in the mass murder of European Jewry.

For decades, this wagon sat in the rail yard behind the Blankenburg-Harz train

station in this former East German town. It had a story to tell.

"We knew about the history," said Spehr, 58, co-founder of the Bruecke — "bridge" — Society, which trains unemployed youth and older workers in this economically strapped area. "But when we thought that we're restoring a train that might have been used to carry people to their death, I got chills down my spine. It made me shiver."

In the 63 years since it was built, this wooden car also may have been used to transport Nazi troops, then East German troops; it may have been used for inanimate cargo. Finally, in its retirement, the car was used for storage and short hauls around the rail yard.

Thousands of miles away, the directors of the Holocaust Museum Houston were looking for just such a boxcar. Susan Llanes-Meyers, now the museum's executive director, wanted to make history come alive for younger visitors, Peter Berkowitz, chairman of the museum's board of directors, told JTA.

Neither the Austrian nor German consulates could help, Berkowitz said. The Deutsche Bahn German rail company said it no longer owned such cars.

"I had to write to them that we don't have any more," DB historian Susanne Kill told JTA. "Not many are still existing, and if they are existing they are not in their original shape anymore."

Finally, in August, a chain of business contacts and friends led Berkowitz to the 1873 rail yard in Blankenburg. In October, Berkowitz contacted Alfred Gottwaldt, senior curator for the German Technical Museum in Berlin and a world-renowned expert on deportation trains, for help in identifying the car.

In 1988 Gottwaldt's museum became the first to display an original boxcar to illustrate the railways' role in the Holocaust. Today, some 10 museums worldwide display such cars, including Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Gottwaldt confirmed that the car in Blankenburg was made during World War II and that such cars were used for depor-

tations. During restoration, the original maker's plaque from 1942 was found under old paint.

But "there is no proof for any existing car that it was used in a deportation train," Gottwaldt emphasized.

"They all are symbols" of the "mechanical function, the precision of the German authorities, which is a part of the mass murder."

In Houston, the car will stand outside in a setting designed by architecture students at Rice University, Berkowitz said.

Among those waiting with mixed feelings are Ann Blum and her husband Morris, Holocaust survivors from Poland who live in Houston. "For me personally,

it's bittersweet," Ann Blum said in a telephone interview. On one hand the boxcar will enable visitors to "see and understand better, including my children and grandchildren," but the "bitter side is, I go [to the museum] very often" and "for me it is going to be a constant reminder of the past."

Ann Blum was

shipped to her first labor camp in a freight car, on Feb. 18, 1943. She faced at least four more such moves, she said.

Morris Blum, one of the rare few who survived four years at Auschwitz-Birkenau, saw hundreds of thousands of such cars arrive at the death camp full and leave empty.

"It will be very important for all the world to know," said Morris Blum. "All my family got off the train. First my parents were taken away and of course the kids. The only one I saved is my brother, Lee. I pulled him over to the side."

The cost of the entire project, including the educational program connected with it, is nearly \$900,000, most of which has been donated. Donors include the Texas-based Energy and Projects team, for shipping; British Petroleum, which donated 45 tons of fuel; Ross Perot in Dallas, who handled landing rights; the Houston construction company Linbeck, which offered construction and preservation assistance; and the Rio Grande Pacific Corp., which is donating tracks and bedding for the exhibit. ■

**A symbol of the mechanization and precision that the German authorities employed while committing mass murder.**

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ A major Israeli economic conference takes place at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City, to coincide with a Jewish marketplace at the site. "The conference will be a great opportunity to learn from and network with other companies that are investing in and outsourcing to Israel," said Zohar Peri, Israel's economic minister to North America.

### WEDNESDAY

■ Iran resumes talks with the "E.U. 3" — Germany, Britain and France — over the Islamic republic's nuclear program. Talks will take place in Vienna or Geneva. The Europeans have said in recent days they're less inclined than ever to believe Iran's insistent claims that its plans are peaceful, given the spate of anti-Semitic statements from the Iranian president.

### THURSDAY

■ The Orthodox Union holds its 15th annual West Coast Torah Convention, through Dec. 25 in Beverly Hills, Calif. Highlights include a fireside chat from the O.U.'s executive vice president, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Weinreb, on polarization within Orthodox Judaism, and sessions on the role of O.U. schools.

### SUNDAY

■ Michael Chertoff, the Jewish homeland security secretary, lights the first candle of the "national menorah" on the White House lawn.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Bush pressed on Saudi aid

A U.S. congressman called on President Bush not to waive a congressional ban on U.S. aid to Saudi Arabia.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) authored language in this year's Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that prevents the United States from sending money to Saudi Arabia unless the president can ascertain that the country has cooperated in the war against terror. Last year, the president waived the ban.

"Saudi support for terrorist groups from Hamas to Al Qaeda directly contradicts your assertion that Saudi Arabia is cooperating with the war on terror," Weiner and nine other members of Congress wrote in a letter to Bush.

### Pro-Rice letter garners 108 lawmakers

A congressional letter urging Condoleezza Rice to maintain active involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process garnered 108 signatures.

The letter was sent last Friday. Americans for Peace Now lobbied for the letter, initiated by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee, and Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.).

The letter commends the U.S. secretary of state for brokering a border-opening agreement among Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians and says it "clearly demonstrate the value of robust, hands-on U.S. diplomatic engagement with Israel and the Palestinians."

### Judge orders nurse to repay N.Y. federation

A judge ordered a nurse to repay almost \$1 million to the estate of a Jewish couple so that the New York Jewish federation may receive its due inheritance.

Eve Preminger, a surrogate judge in Manhattan, this week found that Hala Delcina Brown took \$956,000 from bank accounts belonging to Alfred and Mary Fischer in the final years of their lives.

Mary died in 1997, aged 92, and Alfred died in 1998, at the age of 97.

Brown said the money was for payment for items she purchased on the Fischers' behalf, and for gifts.

The UJA-Federation of New York, the beneficiary of Alfred Fischer's will, sued to recover the money.

## WORLD

### European aid to P.A. at risk

The European Union said aid to the Palestinian Authority could be at risk if it engages politically with Hamas.

"It is very difficult that parties that do not condemn violence without changing those positions can be partners for the future," the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said Sunday during a visit to Israel.

He said that if Hamas makes political gains in the January Palestinian Authority parliamentary election, it would be "very difficult for the help and the money that goes to the Palestinian Authority to continue to flow."

Like the United States, the European Union classifies Hamas as a terrorist group, but its leaders have voiced some willingness to engage the radical Islamic group politically.

### E.U. considering Iran sanctions

The European Union is considering sanctions against Iran because of its president's Holocaust denial and calls for Israel's destruction.

"These comments are wholly unacceptable and have no place in civilized political debate," said a statement issued last Friday at

an E.U. summit just days before the European Union is to resume negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programs.

The United States and Israel believe Iran is trying to make a nuclear bomb, and have called for sanctions for months, but the Europeans have equivocated.

Iran's interior minister, visiting Greece, said President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comments had been "misunderstood."

### Austria begins compensation

Austria began the process of compensating Holocaust victims.

Payments to Austrians who were stripped of their assets after the Nazis assumed control in 1938 had been delayed by lawsuits, but a federal court in New York cleared the last of the lawsuits last month.

Letters announcing how much each victim will get are to be mailed to 19,300 survivors who have applied.

Andreas Kohl, Austria's Parliament speaker, said he had signed 100 of the letters and plans to spend three hours on Monday signing another 1,300.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Hamas wins big in cities

Hamas won major West Bank cities in municipal voting.

Results released from last Friday's vote showed the Islamist terrorist group winning 13 of 15 seats on the Nablus council, eight of seven seats in Jenin and nine of 15 seats in El Bireh, a large suburb of Ramallah.

Analysts said the wins were the result of a split between the old guard and young guard in Fatah, the ruling party of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel has said it will not deal with Hamas should it win a place in government in legislative elections next month.

### Terrorists kill Israeli

An Israel man was killed when terrorists opened fire on a vehicle near a West Bank settlement.

Yossi Shuk, 35, from the settlement of Beit Hagai, was shot last Friday as he was driving near Kiryat Arba close to Hebron, the army said.

Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Brigade, the terrorist arm of the Palestinians' ruling Fatah Party, claimed joint responsibility.

Shuk was married and a father of five, including a month-old daughter.

### Gaza terrorist kills himself

A senior Gaza Strip terrorist was killed when an explosive exploded in his car.

The man, a member of the Abu el-Reesh Brigades in southern Gaza, died Saturday when his car blew up after he helped carry out rocket attacks on Israel.

Also Sunday, Israeli troops killed a Palestinian terrorist on the Gaza Strip border.

### Israeli: Saddam's WMDs in Syria

Saddam Hussein moved his chemical weapons to Syria before the U.S.-led war on Iraq began, a former Israeli military chief said.

"He transferred the chemical agents from Iraq to Syria," Moshe Ya'alon, who was Israel's top general during Operation Iraqi Freedom, told the New York Sun last week. "No one went to Syria to find it."

The remarks came as President Bush admitted that much of the U.S. intelligence regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was incorrect.