



IN THE NEWS

Bin Laden: West in 'Zionist crusade'

Osama bin Laden said the West's refusal to financially support a Hamas-led Palestinian government proves that the United States and Europe are at war with Islam.

In an audiotape broadcast Sunday by Al-Jazeera, a voice believed to be that of the Al-Qaida leader called the cutoff in aid to the Palestinian Authority a "blockade" that "proves that there is a Zionist crusader war on Islam."

The United States and the European Union have said they will not send aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority unless Hamas renounces terrorism and recognizes the State of Israel.

Olmert looks ready to form a coalition

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is expected to form a 27-minister Cabinet.

Olmert entered the last stage of government coalition talks Sunday, with his top prospective partner, Labor Party chief Amir Peretz, slated to take the Defense Ministry. [Story, Pg. 3]

Conservative Jews in Israel sue over Wall

The Israeli wing of Conservative Judaism filed a lawsuit against the Israeli government claiming discrimination in praying at the Western Wall.

The lawsuit filed Sunday follows an agreement between the movement and the government that assured its members freedom of worship at the Robinson's Arch area at the southern end of the Western Wall, which is separate from the nearby traditional site of Jewish prayer.

During the past year, officials with the movement say, they have been told they have to pay an entrance fee of 30 shekels to the tourist center that runs the site in order to pray.

WORLD REPORT

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Some elderly Georgian Jews have fond memories of Stalin

By MICHAEL J. JORDAN

GORI, Georgia (JTA) — Schalva Chaimovich Mamistvalov is one of those proud older Soviet men — and, sometimes, women — who for big occasions will don the dark blazer upon which they've pinned a chestful of medals for World War II heroics.

Among elderly Jewish veterans like Mamistvalov, this may be for occasions ranging from national celebrations to a communal Passover seder.

On a steamy August day in his hometown of Gori, Mamistvalov, 83, has chosen to wear his bemedaled coat to greet a foreign reporter. Minutes later, he politely asks to remove it because the room is not air conditioned and the medals weigh so much.

But that doesn't diminish his pride in his service, nor in his commander in chief — the notorious Soviet dictator, Josef Stalin, who was born there.

Mamistvalov is one of a rare breed: a Jew apologetic, even nostalgic, for the iron-fisted ways of Stalin. This sentiment is particularly strong among the Jews of Gori, where worship of the man born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili permeates the entire city.

At 22, Mamistvalov was a tank driver in southern Russia, protecting the northern Caucasus. He earned his medals for bravery in combat and injuries suffered.

He voluntarily rolls up his pant leg to show a deep gash in his left calf courtesy of shrapnel that also tore into his right bicep and landed him in a hospital for a month.

But Mamistvalov got off easier than two older brothers.

The eldest was killed in 1942 during the Soviets' pivotal defense of Stalingrad, while the second-oldest, Ilo, was captured by the Germans and imprisoned.

Ilo later escaped and hid until the war ended; he eventually returned to Gori.

However, prisoner-soldiers like Ilo disgusted Stalin, Gori's most famous native son: He viewed them as traitors and possible spies.

Ilo was sentenced to seven years of hard labor, during which he mostly chopped trees. He wound up serving five years, spared the last two when Stalin died in 1953.

Yet Schalva Mamistvalov doesn't blame Stalin for the madness that engulfed Ilo. Neither does he robustly defend his brother, preferring to offer up Stalin-era propaganda.

"I don't think my brother had a chance to show his bravery," he says. "If I'd been sent to the front, I would have died fighting. But some people prefer life to dying."

His defense of Stalin is odd, given that Stalin was not exactly "good for the Jews."

His crusades against other ethnic minorities under various pretexts devastated Jewish communities, claiming thousands of Jewish lives.

But perhaps Schalva Mamistvalov can be forgiven for seemingly forsaking Ilo. His youth was spent during the height of Soviet indoctrination, intimidation and persecution of Jews. Stalin's "cult of personality" was also rampant, especially in Gori. His name was all over: factories, schools, state institutions, farming collectives — not to mention the ubiquitous Stalin portraits, statues and monuments.

In 1937, during the Great Terror, Stalin took

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ACROSS
THE FORMER
SOVIET
UNION

■ For elderly Jews in Stalin's hometown, the Soviet dictator is still a hero

Continued from page 1

time out to bulldoze the entire Gori neighborhood surrounding his family home- stead, to encase and spotlight the modest two-room cabin inside a mammoth marble mausoleum that stands today.

But for loyalists like Mamistvalov, a retired taxi driver, proof is in the pudding: The 14 years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union have stirred disgust with "freedom" and "democracy."

For Mamistvalov and many others, the recent past only reaffirmed their belief that the Stalinist-era status quo was superior.

Indeed, independent Georgia has been traumatized by two separatist wars that left at least 10,000 people dead and caused hundreds of thousands of refugees in a country of some 5.6 million.

Georgia simultaneously experienced a civil war; entrenched mafia activity and government corruption; and an economic slide that has left pensioners like Mamistvalov struggling to live on a handful of dollars a month.

"For his generation, this ideology was very strong, and he can't change it," says Tamaz Magalashvili, a Gori native and director of the local branch of Hesed, the Jewish welfare agency funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee that provides Mamistvalov with extra food and other assistance.

"He can't say anything bad about Stalin," says Magalashvili.

Others, however, have plenty bad to say about how the ruler who renamed himself Stalin — "Man of Steel" — would treat a

Jewish population of more than 5 million.

In 1952, nine top Kremlin doctors — six of whom had Jewish names — were arrested for allegedly having medically murdered two of Stalin's associates in 1945 and 1948, and for planning to poison other leaders in the future, including Stalin himself.

The blood libel that would become known as the "Doctor's Plot" was painted as a Zionist-Jewish conspiracy conducted from the United States.

It sparked a frenzy of anti-Jewish hatred, from articles in the state-controlled media to Jewish doctors purged from their jobs, which only died when Stalin did.

In 1956, three years later, Nikita Khrushchev uttered his historic denunciation of Stalin's "cult of personality" and mass repression, ushering in a period of de-Stalinization. But in Gori, they bucked the trend.

Stalin's death reportedly sparked rioting in the city, then a police crackdown.

In 1957, just behind the Stalin mausoleum, local authorities unveiled an even more imposing shrine to him: the Stalin Museum, replete with Roman columns outside and an impressive marble stairwell inside. Officials also converted the street leading up to it into a grand promenade, with the Stalin home and museum its centerpiece.

Today, it's a charming area in an otherwise charmless city.

The museum's docent, for one, expresses pride in Gori's favorite son.

"It's quite an honor for me to be working here," says the 50-something woman who only wants to be identified by her nickname — "NeNe."

But what about the deaths of tens of millions for which Western historians blame him? From state-orchestrated famine in Ukraine, to internal deportations of entire populations, to the millions sent to the gulags?

"Yes, he made some mistakes," says NeNe, echoing the official version of the man, "but we can't judge people because of this. Mistakes are a part of life."

"We can't blame all these faults on Stalin. There will come a time when history will see that such actions were needed at the time."

Asked if she thinks Jewish doctors poisoned Stalin, NeNe responds: "We have no facts in Georgia about this. But we heard the rumors that he was poisoned."

Gori Jews, especially the elderly, share the admiration, says Magalashvili.

"If you were to go out into the street and ask people older than 60, they'd say they love Stalin, he was a god, because he won the war and because of this and that," he says, now working toward a punch line. "But if you ask the younger, they'll say 'Screw Stalin. What did he do for us? If he'd lost the war, we'd be living in Germany' — a desired destination — 'and drinking Bavarian beer.'"

Because of the generational split, and the peculiarity of being associated with such a notorious figure, he says, the Stalin-worship has toned down a bit.

While Stalin statues have been torn down across the former empire, and throughout its satellites in Eastern Europe, downtown

Gori sports what is said to be the last such statue — an enormous figure planted in the main square that fronts City Hall.

Slicing through the square is Stalin boulevard, the city's largest artery.

However, a sign of the times is that the city's second-largest square, which also bears Stalin's name, will soon be changed to the "Park of Culture, Rest and Relaxation." Nevertheless, the locals still honor Stalin's Dec. 21 birthday with great fanfare.

And when Georgian public officials visit Gori, says Magalashvili, they are obliged to respect Gorian sensitivities.

"Many would say that Stalin was a dictator," he says. "But if they were in Gori, they would drink a toast to him."

It's difficult to know if Gori's Jews are truly in the dark, or in deep denial. Does it indicate they don't read historical or political material, or don't read much at all? Or does it reveal the indelible marks left by decades of indoctrination and censorship?

Regardless of why they say what they say today about Stalin and his era, the older generation has come to link democracy with heartless capitalism, endemic crime and a daily struggle for survival and dignity. ■

'If you were to go out into the street and ask people older than 60, they'd say they love Stalin.'

Tamaz Magalashvili
Georgian Jew

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Iconoclast Arthur Hertzberg dead at 84

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Years ago, David Twersky asked his secretary to give Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg a call.

"She asked, Can you hold for David Twersky?" recalls Twersky, now the director of international affairs for the American Jewish Congress. When he picked up the receiver, however, he found that Hertzberg had hung up.

When Twersky called back, Hertzberg told him, "The only person I hold for is the president of the United States."

Hertzberg, who died April 17 at age 84 of heart failure, wasn't making it up: Presidents, indeed, called to pick his

brain. The anecdote is telling: Hertzberg was a man of enormous influence — and he knew it.

His views, say those who knew him, were frequently contrarian and often controversial, but they always were backed by an extraordinary intellect.

Born in Lubaczow, Poland, in 1921, Hertzberg immigrated to America with his family in 1926.

He grew up in an Orthodox home in Baltimore and was ordained as a Conservative rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

He served as a Hillel director, an Air Force chaplain and as a pulpit rabbi in congregations in Philadelphia, Nashville and then in Englewood, N.J., where he served as spiritual leader of Temple Emanu-El for some 30 years.

In 1961 Hertzberg took a job as a history professor at Columbia University. Later he taught religion at Dartmouth College and, in 1991, joined the faculty at New York University.

"I think his death represents the end of an era, or a generation, when there were a number of prominent congregational rabbis who also served as international spokespeople, who were intellectuals and accomplished in their writing and teaching — a generation that we don't see any longer today," said Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

"Here was a rabbi who served decades as a congregational rabbi doing the kinds of rabbinic service that every rabbi did: marrying people, burying people, preaching, leading a community.

At the same time, he rose to prominence as the leader of several major organizations and gave voice to Jewish issues of the day, whether they were concerned with interfaith matters, the State of Israel, with human rights and civil rights."

Hertzberg served as president of the American Jewish Congress from 1972 to

1978, and as a member of the World Zionist Congress executive from 1969 to 1978. In 1975 he was elected vice president of the World Jewish Congress, a post he held until 1991.

Hertzberg is author or editor of, among other books, "The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader," "Judaism," "The Jews in America," "Jews: The Essence and Character of a People," "The Fate of Zionism: A Secular Future for Israel & Palestine" and "Jewish Polemics."

He also authored dozens of essays on the state of American Jewry, and an autobiography, "A Jew in America: My Life And a People's Struggle for Identity." He was at work on two books when he died.

Hertzberg was an early and outspoken proponent of racial equality in the United States, taking part in the March on Washington in 1963 at which Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his seminal "I Have a Dream" speech.

He also was chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations when it became the first Jewish group to formally meet with the Vatican about the Church's response to the Holocaust.

In interviews with JTA, friends and colleagues remembered Hertzberg as a brilliant, funny, eloquent man who was not afraid to poke fun at himself or make his opinion known about issues and individuals, sometimes in salty language.

"I think he had great love for all Jews," Meyers said. "What he couldn't stand is phoniness."

In 1999, addressing 500 Conservative rabbis at a Baltimore convention, Hertzberg suggested they should get back into the business of nurturing souls. If they wanted to be CEOs, he scolded, they should have gone into business.

Hertzberg was an early and outspoken dove on Israeli politics. After the 1967 Six-Day War, for example, he ruffled some feathers in the Jewish community by calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

OBITUARY

THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

■ Longtime Israeli political leader Shimon Peres is expected to join the annual March of the Living. The walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau, where an estimated 1 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust, is part of a heritage trip taken by thousands of Jewish high schoolers from around the world each year. After learning about the Holocaust, the trip ends with a visit to Israel.

FRIDAY

■ Among the highlights of the biennial convention of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, taking place in Cambridge, Mass., are several talks and workshops commemorating Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Other Freud-related events are ongoing at more than a dozen individual Humanistic congregations throughout the United States. Forty-three years after its founding, Humanistic Judaism is working on growing. To do that, the movement is embracing a strategy of educating and ordaining its own rabbis, rather than relying on "renegade" clergy who leave other branches of Judaism.

SUNDAY

■ A Jewish coalition is helping to organize a rally in Washington aimed at raising awareness about the mass killings and refugee crisis in Darfur. Organizers are hoping for tens of thousands of people at the march. Allocating more money to the African Union, establishing a no-fly zone and enlisting more help from NATO countries are among the possible strategies to ease the situation, says Ruth Messinger, the president of the American Jewish World Service.

Hertzberg's death
'represents the end of
an era.'

Rabbi Joel Meyers
Rabbinical Assembly

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Two Palestinians killed

Israeli forces killed two suspected Palestinian terrorists in a West Bank shootout.

Troops cornered three members of the Al-Aksa Brigade in Bethlehem on Sunday, shooting two dead when they opened fire, Israeli officials said. The third Palestinian was taken into custody.

The three were wanted for firing at the eastern Jerusalem neighborhoods of Gilo and Har Homa.

Hamas, Fatah at odds

Palestinian leaders scrambled to defuse tensions between Hamas and Fatah.

Student supporters of the rival Palestinian factions clashed in the West Bank over the weekend after Hamas' leader abroad, Khaled Meshaal, hinted in a speech that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had harmed the "national interest" by canceling the appointment of a Gaza terrorist to a top security post.

The comments stoked an already simmering power struggle between Abbas, the Fatah leader, and the new Palestinian Authority government under Hamas.

In Palestinian cities, gunmen from Fatah and Hamas staged rallies and warned of internecine violence. The prospect of civil war prompted spokesmen for Fatah and Hamas to vow renewed cooperation.

Abbas vetoes appointment

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas vetoed the appointment of a man on Israel's most wanted list to supervise the ministry that oversees the security services.

Popular Resistance Committees head Jamal Abu Samhadana's appointment was seen as challenge to Abbas, a relative moderate who is seeking to retain control of the Palestinian security apparatus in the wake of Hamas' recent sweep of legislative elections. Samhadana was vying for a spot as the general inspector of a new Palestinian paramilitary police force. U.S. and Israeli officials reacted harshly to word of the appointment of Samhadana, who is No. 2 on Israel's most wanted list.

NORTH AMERICA

Treasury bans P.A. contacts

The U.S. Treasury extended its ban on dealings with Hamas to dealings with the Palestinian Authority. In a statement last week, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said it "has determined that Hamas, a terrorist entity whose property and interests in property are blocked under three separate OFAC-administered economic sanctions programs, has a property interest in the transactions of the Palestinian Authority."

Accordingly, "persons are prohibited from engaging in transactions with the Palestinian Authority unless authorized, and may not transfer, pay, withdraw, export or otherwise deal in any assets in which the Palestinian Authority has an interest unless authorized." OFAC said there would be limited exceptions "consistent with current foreign policy."

Faith-based czar goes

The White House director of faith-based initiatives resigned. Jim Towey, who maintained close contacts with the U.S. Orthodox Jewish community during his four years in the job, quit his post last week to become the president of St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa. "Jim's intellect and industriousness made President Bush's vision of a more empowered American 'army of compassion' — in which the govern-

ment supports the efforts of faith-based social service providers (rather than discriminate against them) — a reality," the Orthodox Union said in a statement.

Most Jewish groups resisted Bush's faith-based plans, which steered social service moneys to religious groups, considering them an impingement on church-state separation.

AIPAC cited in Anderson affair

The AIPAC classified information case is reportedly at the center of a rare FBI quest to retrieve documents from the archives of a dead journalist.

The FBI wants to vet the archives of Jack Anderson, a veteran Washington investigative reporter who died in December.

Anderson's heirs have resisted pressure from the law enforcement agency, and have enlisted legal experts and top journalists who say the demand is an unprecedented encroachment on the sanctity of sources.

In reports last week, family members and others associated with the archives said that FBI agents have told them they are seeking information in the case against Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, two former lobbyists for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee due to go on trial next month for allegedly seeking classified information.

The FBI would not confirm the account, which has a glaring inconsistency: the indictment against Rosen and Weissman cites incidents dating to 1999, and Anderson more or less ended his career in 1990.

WORLD

Germany agrees to open Holocaust archives

Germany agreed to drop its resistance to the opening of one of the world's largest Holocaust archives.

Brigitte Zypries, the German justice minister, made the announcement April 18 in Washington at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the institution that led the call in recent months to open archives of up to 50 million documents at Bad Arolsen, Germany.

Of 11 nations represented on a commission controlling the archives, only Germany and Italy had resisted opening up access, citing privacy concerns for innocents who might be mentioned in the documents.

Germany will now advocate access when the commission meets in mid-May.

U.N. takes on Hezbollah

The United Nations urged Lebanon to disarm the Hezbollah militia. In a report made public last week, U.N. envoy Terje Roed-Larsen reaffirmed the need to implement Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2004, which required that Syria withdraw from Lebanon and that the Beirut government impose its authority throughout the country by disarming militias.

Hezbollah, which enjoys Syrian and Iranian patronage and has continued to clash with Israeli border forces despite Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, rejected the report.

Israeli stabbed in Ukraine

An Israeli yeshiva graduate who was helping to lead Passover seders was attacked in the Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk.

Haim Gorbov was attacked last Friday not far from the city's main shul, the Golden Rose Synagogue.

Several young men, who witnesses said looked like skinheads, allegedly hit Gorbov on his head with a bottle and stabbed him with a knife. Gorbov suffered head injuries, a knife injury to his chest and a broken nose. Doctors are describing his condition as stable.