

**ISRAEL TEMPORARILY SEALS OFF GAZA AS VIOLENCE ERUPTS AT CHECKPOINTS**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 11 (JTA) -- Israel's temporary closure of the autonomous Gaza Strip area is intended to improve security procedures at the Gaza checkpoints, according to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The closure, which went into effect Sunday for an unspecified period of time, prevents all local Palestinian residents, including those with valid work permits, from entering Israel.

The closure was imposed a day before Israeli and Palestinian negotiators convened in Cairo to discuss the next phase of Palestinian autonomy.

It also came amid reports that Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat would be arriving in Gaza this week to begin the task of governing the autonomous regions.

Uri Dromi, director of the Government Press Office, admitted the closure could hurt the atmosphere at the Cairo negotiations, but added that Israel's "interest lies in the border being secure."

The clampdown was imposed following three days of riots at the Erez crossing point at the northern end of Gaza.

Palestinian workers seeking entry to Israel were apparently angered by the bureaucratic practices in force at the crossing point, which resulted in long delays under a hot sun while identity papers and work permits were scrutinized.

According to a statement issued by the Israel Defense Force, three Israeli soldiers were injured and electricity lines were damaged in a melee that erupted Sunday.

Rabin ordered the temporary closure, based on the recommendation of army commanders in the area, to enable the IDF to examine and improve the procedures at the Gaza crossing points.

Some 50,000 Gaza Strip residents hold work permits for employment in Israel, mainly in agricultural and construction jobs.

In the West Bank town of Nablus, meanwhile, Israeli troops reportedly killed two Palestinian terrorists Monday after placing the town under curfew earlier in the day.

The two men, members of the Izz a-Din al-Kassam military faction of the rejectionist Hamas movement, were wanted for killing at least two Israelis, according to an IDF statement.

FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE JORDAN RIVER, LEADERS SPECULATE THAT PEACE IS NEAR

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- A week before his scheduled meeting with the Jordanian prime minister, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is predicting an imminent peace agreement with Jordan.

Speaking before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday, Peres said peace with Jordan was "very near."

"But I won't give you dates and times because I don't know what speed the Jordanians

want to proceed at, nor what obstacles may still stand in the way," Peres reportedly said.

King Hussein of Jordan, addressing his Parliament over the weekend, also spoke of reaching a swift agreement with Israel, adding that he and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin were likely to meet soon.

Peres said that he and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher will meet with Abdul Salam al-Majali, who is Jordan's prime minister, foreign minister and defense minister, in Jordan on July 20.

Israeli officials said Peres would be the first Israeli leader to set foot publicly on Jordanian soil. The late Golda Meir was in Jordan unofficially during her term as foreign minister, and there have also been numerous reports that Hussein has met with Israeli leaders in secret.

The three-way meeting will be held two days after Israeli and Jordanian officials are scheduled to meet on the Israeli side of the border for bilateral talks that will focus on such issues as water resources, borders, security issues and environmental concerns.

Peres revealed the location of the three-way meeting during his appearance before the committee. He refused to say publicly where the historic encounter would take place. But observers believe the three-way meeting will be at a hotel on the Jordanian shore of the Dead Sea.

Last month, Jordan's King Hussein said that progress in his country's negotiations with Israel would not be dependent on progress on the Israeli-Syrian track.

In an address to his Parliament on Saturday, Hussein said that while meeting with President Clinton in Washington in June, he was urged to reach a swift settlement of all outstanding issues separating Israel and Jordan.

Speaking to a Parliament audience that included Muslim fundamentalist leaders opposed to peace with Israel, Hussein suggested that he was being pressured by Washington to move forward with Israel.

Referring to a promise he received from Clinton to ask Congress to forgive Jordan's \$1 billion debt to the United States and to provide Amman with weaponry, Hussein reportedly said:

"If my encounter with the Israeli prime minister is the price to change the image (of Jordan), I will not hesitate at all and I consider it as a duty and honor to serve my nation."

STANDOFF WITH SETTLERS CONCLUDES WITH THE EVACUATION OF APARTMENTS

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, July 11 (JTA) -- A standoff between the Israeli government and settlers who had occupied scores of empty apartments in a Hebron suburb for three days has ended with both sides declaring victory.

Settlers evacuated the apartments Monday after Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer agreed to discuss the matter further with them.

The situation was defused after President Ezer Weizman brokered a compromise in an at-

tempt to avoid a confrontation that some had feared might lead to bloodshed.

The confrontation between settlers and the Israel Defense Force began last Friday, when settlers launched violent demonstrations after a 17-year-old Israeli, Sarit Prigal, was killed by unidentified gunmen.

Prigal was killed a day earlier near her Kiryat Arba home, outside of Hebron, when gunmen opened fire on her father's car.

On the same day, the body of Pvt. Aryeh Frankenthal, a 19-year-old soldier, was found shot and stabbed to death in a West Bank Arab village.

After Prigal was buried last Friday, settlers occupied some 54 apartments outside the West Bank town of Hebron, the site of a bloody massacre of 29 Palestinians in a local mosque by an Israeli settler in February.

The Labor Party had frozen sales of the apartments when it came to power in 1992, and the government has continued to refuse to hand them over for Jewish occupancy.

After some 15 families evacuated the buildings, Ben-Eliezer met with the settlers and promised them a report on the future of the new quarter.

He later said that "the rule of law" had won an end to the confrontation.

But Zvi Katzover, chairman of the Kiryat Arba municipality, said the settlers had scored a victory. He expressed satisfaction at what he interpreted as Ben-Eliezer's readiness to help them.

One young settler was asked why he was leaving the apartments so quietly when 24 hours earlier he had sworn he would not leave alive.

"We are following what our leaders tell us to do," he told reporters.

But, he added, "We'll be back."

SINAI ARTIFACTS EXHIBITED IN ISRAEL BEFORE BEING HANDED OVER TO EGYPTIANS By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, July 11 (JTA) -- Just weeks after Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt in 1967, Israeli archaeologists began a series of groundbreaking excavations that continued until the country's withdrawal from the area in 1982.

Digging in a region that had been virtually ignored by the international scientific community, the Israelis unearthed a wealth of artifacts and skeletons, many dating back over 5,000 years.

In a few months, Israel will return the last of these archeological treasures to Egypt, under the terms of the 1979 peace accord between the two countries.

To usher out the end of an era, the Israel Museum last week launched the exhibit, "Sinai: A Farewell for Peace." Scheduled to close on September 12, this exhibit marks the first -- and possibly last -- time that the Sinai artifacts will be displayed to the Israeli public.

Thanks to the region's dry climate, many of the finds are in remarkably good condition.

Foremost among these are hundreds of cloth and basketry fragments from the 14th century C.E.; painted funerary masks from the 4th-5th century BCE; and a group of "nawamis" -- round stone structures that served as burial tombs. More than 5,000 years old, they are the oldest struc-

tures in the world to have survived with their roofs intact. Some of the structures contained the remains of entire families.

During a press tour of the exhibit prior to its opening, Israeli archaeologists recalled their "love affair" with Sinai and the unique discoveries made there.

Avner Goren, the archaeologist in charge of Sinai excavations for some 15 years, noted that the initial excavations were borne out of practical necessity.

When Israel gained control of the peninsula, it immediately began to build an infrastructure. "One of our main goals was to protect sites from being destroyed when roads were constructed," Goren said, "and another problem was curious tourists who explored half-exposed ruins. Truthfully, our work began as a salvation excavation."

At the time, Goren added, the Israeli excavators felt like pioneers. "Sinai was virtually unknown to archaeologists. Very few sites had been excavated. There was St. Catherine's Monastery and a few places, mostly along the main road."

A Wilderness 'With A Human Touch'

During the archaeologists' 15 years in the Sinai, "we got to know the place and fall in love with it," Goren said. "It was a wilderness, but with a human touch. Bedouins live there. My children grew up among the Bedouins."

It was the Bedouins who helped the Israelis identify potential sites, Goren noted. "They are familiar with the area and helped us very much," he said.

Once a possible site had been identified, the archaeologists employed a number of high-tech research tools, including satellite mapping, to determine what lay beneath centuries' worth of soil and sand.

In all, the Israelis -- most notably teams from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Israel Antiquities Department and Tel Aviv University -- excavated about 19 sites throughout Sinai.

Asked whether he and his colleagues feel some regret handing over the artifacts to the Egyptians, Goren replied, "I do, of course, have a personal attachment to these things, but you must remember that even if they stayed in Israel, I would not keep them in my home. They belong in a museum.

"When you find things, you want them to contribute to a bank of knowledge. When we were in Sinai, we had a small museum at St. Catherine's," he said.

"In a way, these things are going back to their rightful place," Goren added. "They belong to Egypt, and we were aware of it all along. We were working in Sinai like foreign archaeologists work here. Ultimately, the finds belong to the country being excavated."

In Israel to attend the exhibit's opening, Mohammed Abdul, general director of Sinai excavations for the Egyptian Antiquities Authority, stressed that the upcoming transfer is an outgrowth of the peaceful, cooperative relations that exist between Israel and Egypt.

Standing next to Goren, Abdul said, "We are not here only to take the objects, but to celebrate the opening with our dear friends and colleagues."

NEW AJCOMMITTEE POLL SHOWS 1.1 PERCENT DENY HOLOCAUST; REFUTES EARLIER SURVEY

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, July 11 (JTA) -- The shocking statistic that one in five Americans believes the Holocaust may not have occurred has been retested, and officially refuted in a new poll.

A new survey commissioned by the American Jewish Committee and conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide Inc. found that just over 1 percent of respondents deny that the Holocaust occurred, contradicting the group's disputed 1992 poll which had put denial at more than 20 percent.

The new survey, released July 6, also found a strong correlation between denial of the Holocaust and knowledge of basic facts about it. Many of those who questioned or denied that the Holocaust occurred cited lack of information as the reason for their uncertainty, or displayed ignorance of basic facts about the Holocaust.

"Not only are the levels of denial low, but few are dedicated, committed deniers. Most of the questioning of the Holocaust reflects ignorance rather than anti-Semitic commitment," said Tom Smith of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, who analyzed the Roper poll and other data for AJCommittee.

In the new Roper poll, which was conducted in March, 1.1 percent of respondents said it was possible that the Holocaust did not occur, compared with 22 percent in the original survey.

Eight percent of respondents in the new poll said they were not sure whether the Holocaust happened, compared with 12 percent in 1992.

First Survey Questioned Since Release

The drop is attributed to a change in the question meant to gauge denial, which analysts said contained a confusing double negative that led some respondents to answer the opposite of what they intended or to answer "not sure" because they did not understand the question.

The original question was, "Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?"

Burns Roper, the now-retired chairman of the Roper group, explained that questioners were attempting to avoid phrasing that would encourage a positive response.

The new question asked, "Does it seem possible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened, or do you feel certain that it happened?"

In the new poll, 91 percent of those questioned said they were certain the Holocaust happened, compared with 65 percent in the original survey.

The results of the original survey had been questioned since they were released in April 1993 and were officially disavowed by Roper himself in May 1994.

"We should never have approved the question, and we certainly never should have written it," he told a conference of professional pollsters.

The results of the original survey had been viewed by some as shocking evidence that neo-Nazi Holocaust deniers had had a significant impact on American beliefs. There were reports that neo-Nazi groups even cited the AJCommittee poll to encourage their supporters.

But the new poll found that only about half of deniers surveyed and 4 percent of those unsure had ever heard denial claims.

"Without exposure to these claims," said Smith, "these people cannot be adopting and following their denials."

The AJCommittee has been criticized within the American Jewish community for failing to repudiate the statistics publicly once questions were raised.

"The fact that the AJCommittee knew fairly early on and did nothing about it for 14 months, that's really the scandal and that's what has angered a lot of people" said the leader of a U.S. Jewish organization who requested anonymity.

The AJCommittee had attempted to dissuade Roper from publicly disavowing the question's results at the conference last spring.

AJCommittee Executive Director David Harris said the group had wanted to wait until results of the new poll had been analyzed before making a public statement.

"This was not something that happened the day after the survey was released," said Harris, who said the serious conflicts over the question became clear in December 1993, and were referred to in an AJCommittee publication last January.

"When we were convinced of it, I think we acted entirely appropriately," Harris said.

The denial question was written by the Roper group.

The recent Roper poll was the result of in-person interviews with 991 adults across the country. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The poll also found a 7 percent increase from the 1992 survey in general knowledge about the Holocaust.

Smith attributed the increase to publicity surrounding the opening of Holocaust memorial museums in Washington and Los Angeles, as well as the popularity of the movie "Schindler's List."

Harris said that, ironically, publicity surrounding the first Roper poll may also have contributed to the increase in knowledge about the Holocaust itself.

"Maybe it had a sort of unintended, salutary effect," he said.

MAX OPPENHEIMER ART IS SHOWN IN VIENNA

By Gil Sedan

BONN, July 11 (JTA) -- One of the forgotten great artists of Austrian Jewry is receiving belated recognition this summer at Vienna's recently opened Jewish Museum.

The museum is showing a retrospective of the works of Max Oppenheimer, who died 40 years ago, alone and forgotten. Oppenheimer, once a famed painter known throughout Europe, fled the Nazis in 1938, the year Austria was declared part of Germany.

The Jewish Museum of Vienna has gathered Oppenheimer's scattered works from many European countries, Israel and the United States for this avant-garde artist's first retrospective.

The museum's curators say this exhibit is taking place not only because Oppenheimer was Jewish but in order to "rectify an omission" created by the Nazis, who had labeled his art "degenerate."

The exhibition will remain through Sept. 18.

JEWISH AGENCY ASSEMBLY CONCLUDES WITH STRAINED PARTNERSHIP INTACT

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, July 11 (JTA) -- The Jewish Agency Assembly concluded last month with the strained partnership between the Zionists and the Diaspora fund-raisers intact -- at least for the next three years.

Assembly delegates signed an agreement that continues to designate the Jewish Agency as the exclusive recipient of funds raised by the United Jewish Appeal and transferred by the United Israel Appeal.

The agreement is to last five years, with an option for either side to reopen the terms after three years.

The assembly also agreed to implement key reforms aimed at making the agency less political and more efficient. The reforms were pushed primarily by the fund-raisers and were resisted by some of the Zionists, who believed the reforms were part of an effort to undermine their status.

Some members say the decision to continue the contract after three years will depend on how successfully the reforms are implemented.

The assembly, the policy-setting body of the Jewish Agency, met amidst deeply felt tensions between its two partners.

On one side is the World Zionist Organization, with representatives of Diaspora Zionist organizations and Israel's Zionist political parties.

On the other side are the Diaspora fund-raisers, who contribute the bulk of the Jewish Agency's \$500 million budget with funds raised by UJA through local federations and by Keren Hayesod, UJA's international sibling.

The contract agreement between the two sides followed heated debate begun even before the assembly, when some of the fund-raisers threatened to eliminate the Jewish Agency's exclusivity.

The threat triggered a fierce response in some quarters of the Jewish Agency. Agency Treasurer Hanan Ben-Yehuda threatened to sever the agency's ties with UJA and raise funds independently if agency exclusivity were removed.

Eliminating Heads Of Three Departments

During the assembly, Ben-Yehuda offered a carefully worded, formal apology for his threat, saying he would work to "heal the wounds" inflicted by the episode and to rebuild confidence among "those who provide the resources."

As part of the reforms, meanwhile, the assembly voted to eliminate the department heads of three agency departments: immigration and absorption, youth aliyah, and rural and urban development. The positions have long been denigrated by the fund-raisers as Zionist political posts.

The change is slated to be carried out in 1997 at the next World Zionist Congress.

The assembly also agreed on a controversial plan to take immediate effect, to raise the number of members on the Board of Governors from 74 to 120 and on the assembly from 398 to 518.

The increase is aimed at broadening the base of participation to include sectors not traditionally represented, including academia and industry.

The assembly also agreed to reduce the WZO staff by 20 percent over the next four years.

The three actions were part of a package of reforms proposed by the Committee of Six, composed of three representatives from each side of the partnership.

They were approved only after a secret vote by the Zionist General Council, the WZO's legislative body, of 84 to 52.

The vote came after pressure was applied by WZO leaders who told delegates the entire partnership would be threatened if they didn't support the reforms.

"The (WZO) deliberations were difficult," said one well-placed WZO source. The delegates labored under the "distinct feeling" the contract agreement and the Committee of Six recommendations would "undermine their status within the partnership."

But they accepted both "for the sake of the partnership that is necessary for the mission" of the Jewish Agency, he said. Meanwhile, the contract "gives us three years to sort out the differences (between us) and find appropriate solutions," he said.

The assembly meeting was held against a background of increasingly insistent calls by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin to dismantle the Jewish Agency. Beilin has charged it is an outmoded body and no longer effectively serves the Israel-Diaspora partnership.

Beilin renewed his calls at a meeting with reporters in New York earlier this month, promising to have a full, detailed plan available by September.

Beilin Not The Only Critic

Beilin said in New York he believes that Diaspora philanthropy should leave Israel's social welfare problems totally to the government, and instead should increase its efforts for Jewish education by fully subsidizing youth trips to Israel.

Yehiel Leket, whose tenure as acting chairman of the Jewish Agency was extended through October, said he expects to meet with Beilin in the coming weeks to talk about the agency's role and performance.

But, Beilin, who is dismissed by some Jewish Agency officials as a firebrand, is not the only critic.

Gary Tobin, head of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and a keynote speaker at the assembly, termed Beilin's prescription "throwing the baby out with the bath water."

But Tobin warned that reform is urgent. He presented data on changing patterns of Jewish giving showing "this system needs retooling."

Donors are rethinking previously automatic contributions to "umbrella agencies" and are beginning to consider the UJA-Federation system as only "one of many choices," he said.

According to Richard Pearlstone, the new national director of UJA, "Gary's message has (already) been taken to heart in America."

He cited the recent UJA-Council of Jewish Federations study of the relationship of the agencies to the wider Jewish world.

"All the partners recognize this is a living organism which, to survive, has to change and adapt to the new environment," Pearlstone said.

(JTA staff writer Larry Yudelson in New York contributed to this report.)