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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudis won't halt exports

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with President Bush at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas.

The prince told Bush of Arab frustration over U.S. support for Israel.

A Saudi foreign policy adviser told reporters during a break that Abdullah warned that U.S. relations with the Arab world would be endangered unless the Bush administration persuaded Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to pull Israeli troops out of Palestinian areas.

Despite such warnings, Saudi Arabia is not considering suspending oil exports to the United States, according to the spokesman for the Saudi Embassy in Washington.

Prior to Thursday's meeting, a Saudi source close to Abdullah told *The New York Times* that Abdullah would warn Bush that U.S.-Saudi relations would be threatened if Washington fails to moderate its support for Israel.

Sharon: Arafat can go to Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would be willing to let Yasser Arafat go to the Gaza Strip.

In an interview with *The New York Times* on Wednesday, Sharon said he would let the Palestinian Authority president leave the siege around his Ramallah headquarters in order to demonstrate that he would rein in terrorists in Gaza.

But, Sharon added, he expected Arafat to fail the test.

"With Arafat, no one will be able to make peace," Sharon said.

No nationality on ID cards

Israel's Interior Ministry began issuing identity cards that do not specify the holder's nationality. Thursday's move came after the High Court of Justice issued a ruling last month that people who undergo Reform and Conservative conversions should be recorded as Jews on their identity cards.

Interior Minister Eli Yishai, who leads the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, said at the time that he would not carry out the court's directive.

The idea to completely cancel the nationality line came about in an attempt to circumvent the court ruling.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Pro-Palestinian activists take page from pro-Israel community's playbook

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — There's the diplomatic front, the P.R. war and the actual battlefield.

Now the Middle East conflict is also playing out in the American street.

For months, pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups have demonstrated with some regularity in New York and other cities nationwide.

The street activism reached a crescendo in the past two weeks.

On April 15, more than 100,000 pro-Israel supporters poured into Washington for a rally that was said to be the largest-ever on behalf of the 54-year-old Jewish state.

Then on Saturday, tens of thousands of "anti-war, anti-racism" protesters converged on the nation's capital — media reports estimated between 35,000 and 50,000 — in defense of the Palestinians, against the campaign in Afghanistan and against the assault reportedly in the works for Iraq.

Another rally that day in San Francisco reportedly drew between 30,000 and 50,000, and several others took place across the country.

And on Monday, outside the annual conference of the influential pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, several hundred Palestinians, socialists and environmental activists chanted slogans such as "Long Live the Intifada" and demanded that the United States staunch the flow of military aid to Israel.

The real prize at stake: American public opinion, and ultimately, U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Even with much of the Third World, the United Nations and Western Europe solidly behind the Palestinians, it appears clear that the position of the United States is the only position that truly matters.

Pro-Israel advocates say the United States is proving itself to be Israel's "indispensable ally" now more than ever.

Which is worrying the other side.

The United States has become the main player on the international stage, Edward Said, a Columbia University professor and a Palestinian activist, wrote recently in the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*.

"However, we have never realized the importance of methodical organization of political work on a popular level, in an effort to bring about a situation in which the ordinary American does not immediately think of 'terrorism' whenever he hears the word 'Palestinian.' This kind of work provides real protection for the gains achieved on the ground through our resistance to Israeli occupation."

While pro-Palestinian advocates like Said bemoan the inadequate level of pro-Palestinian organization here in the United States, Jewish observers note with admiration and worry the huge strides made toward leveling the playing field.

There was a time when the American Jewish activism reigned supreme.

Yet, as the Arab- and Muslim-American population has grown in this country, these groups have observed how certain pressure groups got their points across.

"Many in the Arab- and Palestinian-American community have been wise to learn from the history of activism in this country, whether for good causes or bad, if it was against Vietnam or South Africa's apartheid, or for Zionism," said Mazin Qumsiyeh, a co-founder and spokesman for *Al-Awda*, the Palestinian Right to Return Coalition, which has been involved in organizing numerous pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

With that wisdom has come greater savvy in public advocacy, say some Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ten Palestinians killed in clashes

At least 10 Palestinians were killed in several incidents Thursday in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Four armed Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli troops when they tried to infiltrate a Gaza Strip settlement early Thursday morning. In the West Bank, Israeli troops killed five Palestinian policemen south of Hebron. The army said the five policemen opened fire on the troops from a passing car.

In Hebron, a member of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's presidential guard was killed in a clash with an undercover Israeli security unit that entered the Palestinian-controlled section of the city in a failed attempt to trap a wanted Palestinian.

Child terror shocks Palestinians

Three Palestinians who were shot and killed Tuesday while trying to infiltrate the Gaza settlement of Netzarim were schoolboys, Israeli officials confirmed. The three, who were between the ages of 14 and 15, were apparently emboldened by a Hamas demonstration to carry out an attack on the settlers. Palestinians said the attack was the second in a week carried out by boys 15 or younger.

Palestinian parents called for an investigation into whether radical Islamic groups had recruited the boys. Hamas subsequently issued a statement urging Palestinian youngsters to "remember that their lives are precious and should not be sacrificed."

Ze'evi's murderers sentenced

A Palestinian tribunal sentenced four men for last October's slaying of Israeli Cabinet Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

In a trial held at Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters, the four received jail terms ranging from one to 18 years. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rejected the sentences and said Israel would continue to demand their extradition.



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observers. For example, pro-Palestinian demonstrators are trying to appeal to a wider swath of society by portraying the conflict as one that transcends politics and land, and is more about fighting racism and defending human rights.

The Palestinian cause is "not about two sides, not about two tribes, but clearly an issue between those who care about human rights versus a small and getting-smaller group of people who think tribal," Qumsiyeh, a geneticist at Yale University, told JTA, characterizing Israel supporters in the latter group.

In many ways, pro-Palestinian activists now match the Jewish community move for move: A flurry of large newspaper ads published by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee over the past week in The New York Times, Washington Post and International Herald Tribune seemed to be a page taken from the Jewish playbook.

Sometimes, they also succeed in putting the Jewish community on the defensive: Jewish students are now struggling to counter Arab and Muslim activists who recently launched on several university campuses a campaign to divest from Israel, similar to that taken during the 1980s against apartheid in South Africa.

What prevents their message from penetrating a wider audience, pro-Palestinian activists routinely say, is "Zionist influence" over the media and lawmakers.

Jewish leaders, not surprisingly, disagree.

"They are trying to emulate the example set by American Jews, whether in the streets or other means, but there's a fundamental misunderstanding on their part," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which was a co-organizer of the April 15 rally.

"The American people support us because they agree with us. And the congressional leadership comes to our rallies, not theirs, because at ours, everyone supports the administration."

In contrast, he said, they criticize the administration, and what they say is not in sync with the view of the lawmakers and "what is seen as America's interest."

More effective than the activists on the ground, Hoenlein said, are the Arab spokespeople who appear frequently on CNN and speak directly to viewers.

Hoenlein conceded, though, that pro-Palestinian supporters in America have gained the upper hand on college, and even high school, campuses.

He also said the Jewish community has grown too complacent.

"I don't see us challenged by" the other side, "but they do write to the media, to their congressmen, and do make their voices heard," Hoenlein said.

"Too often our community takes it for granted — it's been there, done that — and forgets the importance of this kind of activism."

As for public demonstrations, both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian activists say they aim to raise awareness of their cause.

But many admit that they don't expect to change many minds with chants or posters that blare "Arafat Is a Terrorist" or "Sharon Is a War Criminal."

To a large degree, it seems, anyone who cares about what happens in the Middle East likely has his or her mind made up about who's to blame.

Polls in the United States seem to bear that out. Over the years, they have shown consistently stronger support for Israel, and the intifada hasn't changed it dramatically.

But there are other tangible reasons for such rallies.

Primarily, they're aimed at attracting media attention, in hopes of snatching air time on the 6 o'clock news or some ink in the next day's paper.

In fact, a rally's success is often gauged not by attendance, but by the amount of media coverage it garnered.

The media's platform enables activists to simultaneously reinforce their "talking points" to the public and to let elected officials know that such-and-such segment of the electorate is holding them accountable for their policies.

A second reason for demonstrations is the message of solidarity — whether it be to the Jews in Israel or to the Palestinians in the territories.

With thousands of miles separating American Jews or Arabs from their brethren in the Holy Land, participants say a media-covered public demonstration is an outlet to vent pent-up frustration and one of the few ways to illustrate that "we are with you."

Finally, rally organizers also want to encourage and mobilize the like-minded around the country, who may be despairing that little or nothing is being done domestically to help alter the status quo. □

JEWISH WORLD

Saudi envoy defends poem

The Saudi ambassador to Britain defended a poem he wrote praising Palestinian suicide bombers. In a letter posted on the Saudi Arabian Embassy's Web site, Ghazi Algoasibi defended the poem and accused Israel of committing war crimes.

The ambassador claimed that Israeli prime ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir and Ariel Sharon were terrorists responsible for the murder of many Palestinians. He added that he would change his views about suicide bombers when Jewish leaders label past and present Israeli leaders as terrorists.

In a poem published earlier this month, Algoasibi praised Ayat Akhras, an 18-year-old Palestinian who blew herself up in a Jerusalem supermarket March 29, killing two Israelis and wounding 25 others.

E.U. blasts anti-Semitism

The European Union condemned anti-Semitic attacks taking place across the continent. In a statement issued Thursday in Luxembourg, the 15 E.U. interior ministers condemned "the racist acts perpetrated in various places" and vowed to "step up preventive action and the fight against racist violence and anti-Semitism."

Also Thursday, the 44-member Council of Europe held an emergency session in Strasbourg, France, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the end of the session, members of the human rights group called on the European Union to suspend its economic ties with Israel.

U.S. warns Americans abroad

The United States warned that Americans may be targeted because of Arab resentment over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The alert issued Wednesday focused on possible attacks in the Persian Gulf or in the Arabian Peninsula.

The statement said Americans should be careful, and that "softer targets" may be selected by terrorists because security at U.S. installations has been strengthened.

Myanmar Jews make aliyah

The remnant of Myanmar's once-thriving Jewish community is considering leaving for Israel. In 1964, military dictator Ne Win unleashed a socialist-inspired nationalization drive. In Yangon, the capital, the Jewish community that once numbered around 2,500 was forced out of business and out of the country en masse.

Only 20 Jews from eight families remain now in the nation once known as Burma, and many of them are planning to leave for Israel, Jewish leader Moses Samuels told Reuters.

Hide your Jewish identity? German police give mixed answer

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Police here are giving mixed messages about whether they are advising Jews to hide their identity to prevent anti-Semitic attacks.

A police spokesperson told an Israeli reporter that Jews in Berlin might want to hide their Stars of David or avoid wearing yarmulkes because police can't protect all of them from possible attack.

Later, the office of the city's police chief issued a statement denying that police were giving Jews such advice.

Tuesday's statement, however, did not deny that such measures might help prevent anti-Semitic attacks.

There have been a series of recent attacks against Jews and Jewish sites in Germany linked to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the statement, the Berlin Police Department declared that Jewish and Israeli sites in Berlin receive the highest possible degree of protection.

"The Berlin police express their sincere regret if the words of a colleague have led to any misunderstanding in Israel and in the Jewish community," the statement said.

But the statement acknowledged the rash of recent incidents in which Jews here were accosted and attacked, allegedly by Arab youths. No arrests have been made.

"The possibility of isolated attacks by Arab youths against Jewish citizens cannot be excluded completely, considering the background of the Mideast conflict," the statement added.

The statement was issued following a broadcast Tuesday on Israel's Army Radio, subsequently picked up by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, about a conversation between an Israeli journalist based in Berlin and a press spokesperson for the Berlin police department.

According to a transcript of the broadcast provided by Berlin police, the reporter quoted the spokesperson as advising that "Berlin Jews be careful, but not anxious, and occasionally alter their accustomed routes when walking in the city."

The spokesperson also "promised that all Berlin is safe for Jews. But the Berlin police can not personally protect every rabbi or Orthodox Jew."

The police spokesperson then agreed with the reporter, saying Jews who wear jewelry with Jewish symbols or Orthodox garb "are naturally recognizable. And unfortunately it is not possible to protect them in every situation."

According to the transcript, the spokesperson then said he could recommend ways for Berlin Jews to avoid problems, but "could well imagine that my suggestions might offend our Orthodox fellow citizens.

"Naturally one thing to try would be not displaying one's faith to the outside world, whether through clothing or symbols, through the kippah or similar objects, Stars of David, naturally," he said.

"But it is clearly a difficult subject, especially if one wants to display one's faith.

"Anyway, that would be one means [to protect oneself], and everyone can determine if this is something they consider useful for themselves."

The spokesperson's comment, as well as the official police statement, drew an angry reaction from Rabbi Chaim Rozwaski, one of Berlin's chief rabbis.

"It is time to create an atmosphere where hostility toward Jews is not acceptable," he told JTA. "Jews should not have to hesitate to express their Jewishness. Problems in the Mideast are no excuse for hooliganism in Berlin."

He added that police "should address themselves to the mosques in Germany and especially in Berlin. The imams should preach tolerance, respect and friendly relations among all the citizens of Berlin."

Rabbi Yehudah Teichtal, the Lubavitch rabbi in Berlin, expressed shock at the Israeli news report, but said he would not alter his dress.

"We answer darkness with light, and terror with more positive acts," Teichtal said.

Two rabbinical students who visited Teichtal from the United States were attacked, allegedly by Arab men, during Passover.

In private conversation, some Berlin Jews have said they have stopped wearing Jewish stars openly, fearing that they, too, will be victimized. □

European Jews seek strategy as anti-Semitic attacks mount

By Ruth E. Gruber

BUDAPEST (JTA) — European Jewish leaders are searching for a common strategy to confront a mounting wave of anti-Semitism apparently linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Leaders from more than 20 countries met earlier this week for two days in Brussels about how to confront the anti-Semitic outbursts. The meeting grouped leaders of the European Jewish Congress, the European Council of Jewish Communities, the World Jewish Congress and representatives of individual Jewish communities from across the continent.

One of its aims was to create a unified political voice for European Jewry and set up a standing policy committee to coordinate a response to the new spate of anti-Semitic violence.

At the end of the meeting, the WJC announced that it would establish an international task force to track the activities of the United Nations, which often is perceived as hostile to Israel. The need for such a body became clear after last summer's U.N. anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa, turned into one of the most vicious outpourings of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiment at an international forum since World War II.

The WJC also plans to establish a Jewish lobby in Europe, similar to Jewish lobbies in the United States, to monitor anti-Semitism and make Jewish concerns about it known to European governments.

Delegates said they also planned to organize within the next few weeks a mass rally of European Jews in either Brussels — the headquarters of the European Union — or Strasbourg, France, the site of the European Parliament, to show that European governments must shake off their indifference and not dismiss anti-Semitism in Europe as simply fallout from the Middle East.

European "governments cannot just shrug their shoulders and say it's all part of the Middle East problem," Avi Beker, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, told Reuters.

There has been a spate of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe since the onset of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000. These have ranged from verbal taunts and graffiti to attacks on synagogues and other Jewish buildings. Several Jews have been roughed up on the street. The number of incidents has increased sharply since Israel launched its incursions into the West Bank in late March. Figures provided by the European Jewish Congress counted some 300 anti-Jewish attacks in the last three weeks.

In Belgium alone, a synagogue in the town of Charleroi was sprayed with bullets over the weekend in an apparent drive-by shooting. Two other Belgian synagogues were recently firebombed, and suspected arsonists also targeted a Brussels building that housed a Jewish bookshop.

Police and other observers believe most of the incidents have been the acts of individual hooligans or angry, alienated youths, rather than part of an orchestrated campaign. Most incidents have occurred in Western Europe, especially in France, but there have been several incidents in former Communist countries, including an attack earlier this month on a synagogue in Kiev, Ukraine.

Even at this conference, for example, two Jewish leaders were attacked in Brussels. Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the former Soviet Union, was attacked as he stepped off the train that brought him to the Brussels meeting. He said an Arab-looking man punched him

in the stomach, stole his hat and called him a "terrorist."

Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt also said he was attacked by four Arabs who shouted, "Death to the Jews!"

"The Jewish communities are very concerned about the situation," Gabriel Taus, executive director of the European Council of Jewish Communities, told JTA. "If some people doubted the seriousness of it before, they don't doubt it now. There has been a drastic rise in incidents. Some people are openly wondering if the current situation can be compared to the 1930s."

Taus said the Brussels meeting had been planned for some time as part of an ongoing attempt to forge a united political voice for European Jewry. Several Israeli officials also took part.

In a related development, the European Union of Jewish Students issued a statement decrying the spate of anti-Semitic violence and urging European governments to move actively to stamp it out.

"We see before us to what extent there is a misuse of the Middle East conflict to create open displays of anti-Semitism," it said. "As a result, synagogues have been attacked, Molotov cocktails have been thrown at Jewish buildings and Jewish students on campuses have been targeted."

"We, representing Jewish youth across Europe, denounce those who want to transform the war between Israel and Palestine into a generalized 'Intifada' between Jews and Muslims on European grounds," it said. □

New Zealand officials reject Israel Independence Day invitation

By Henry Benjamin

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — The government of New Zealand has boycotted this year's Israel Independence Day celebrations. At a cabinet meeting attended by Prime Minister Helen Clark, the government decided to break with tradition and not send any minister or official representative to a reception last week in New Zealand's capital, Wellington, celebrating the 54th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

Details of the snub were made public in the New Zealand Parliament, when former Prime Minister Jenny Shipley questioned Foreign Minister Phil Goff about whether the country was maintaining an even-handed approach to the conflict in the Middle East.

Last week, Goff met with the Israeli ambassador, Ruth Kahanoff, to officially object to Israel's continued military presence in the West Bank. This week, Goff hosted a meeting with an Australian-based Palestinian representative, Ali Kazak, at which he condemned the Israeli military "over-reaction." He also condemned Palestinian suicide bombings.

Goff, who has spent time on a kibbutz, told Parliament that the decision was deliberate. A government spokesman later said the "Cabinet decided it was inappropriate to attend a cocktail party given the current situation in the Middle East."

"It was a reprimand to the Israeli Government by New Zealand over aspects of Israel's policies which we do not regard as acceptable." Not going to the reception was less unfriendly than "what is happening to the people of the West Bank."

But Ambassador Kahanoff denied that the function at the prestigious Wellington Club was a party. "Over 200 people made a special effort to attend in a show of solidarity, including the U.S. ambassador and U.K. representatives, as well as ambassadors from most major countries." □