

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

8 killed in Gaza raid

At least eight Palestinians were killed as the Israeli army conducted anti-terror raids in two Gaza Strip refugee camps Sunday night.

Clashes erupted as dozens of Israeli tanks entered the camps, and Palestinians said the dead included a woman and a 13-year-old boy.

Israeli troops also operated Sunday night in the West Bank city of Nablus.

House demolitions controversial

The U.S. State Department said Monday it is "deeply concerned" about Israel's practice of demolishing the homes of Palestinian terrorists.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that while the United States understands Israel's need to defend itself, the civilian deaths that have resulted from the house demolitions have alarmed U.S. officials.

"Demolition of civilian structures deprives Palestinians of shelter and the ability to peacefully earn a livelihood," Boucher said.

"It exacerbates the humanitarian situation inside the Palestinian areas and makes more difficult the critical challenge of bringing about an end to violence and the restoration of calm."

On Monday, Israeli soldiers demolished the home of a Palestinian who drove the suicide bomber who carried out the "Passover Massacre" bombing in March 2002 that killed 29 people sitting down to a Passover seder.

Israel arrests Hamas leader

Israel arrested one of the founders of the Hamas movement Monday.

Mohammed Taha was wounded when he was captured during an Israeli anti-terror raid in the Gaza Strip. The capture of Taha, one of Hamas' political leaders, came as Israel intensified its campaign against Hamas.

Arafat sued in French court

Seven French families living in Israel are suing Yasser Arafat in a French court.

The families, relatives of those killed or injured by Palestinian terrorism during the current intifada, are suing the Palestinian Authority president for sponsoring genocide and crimes against humanity.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Meat may be murder, but it's not a holocaust, Jewish groups fume

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — An emaciated death camp survivor stares blankly alongside a gaunt steer.

"During the seven years between 1938 and 1945, 12 million people perished in the Holocaust," the image declares. "The same number of animals is killed every 4 hours for food in the U.S. alone."

The poster forms the heart of a new national campaign launched last week by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals that compares the Holocaust and the meat industry — and that is ruffling Jewish feathers.

Dubbed "Holocaust on Your Plate," PETA's campaign and its companion Web site, masskilling.com, insists the Nazi murder of Jews, gays and gypsies mirrors "the modern-day Holocaust" that is the industrialized slaughter of animals for food.

Just as the Nazis forced Jews to live in cramped, filthy conditions, tore children from parents and murdered people in "assembly-line fashion," factory farms cram animals into tiny, waste-filled spaces, treating cows, chicken and lambs as meat-, egg- and milk-producing machines, PETA says.

"It's a direct parallel," said Matt Prescott, PETA's youth outreach coordinator.

One of the campaign's creators, Prescott, 21, said that as a Jew whose relatives died in the Holocaust he finds the analogy neither "off the wall" nor "radical," but entirely apt. Many of his mother's cousins, aunts and uncles are believed to have been killed in Buchenwald and Dachau, Prescott said, adding that his mother's sense of social justice led him to become a vegetarian, and then vegan.

PETA cites several Jewish figures as spiritual forefathers for its campaign, including Nobel Prize-winning author Isaac Bashevis Singer and the vegetarian Torah scholar, Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelovitz.

Singer was a staunch vegetarian whose fictional characters drew analogies between Nazism and man's treatment of animals in books such as "Enemies, A Love Story."

In "The Letter Writer" from "The Seance and Other Stories," Singer's character Herman delivers a eulogy for a mouse, in which he says that "in relation to" animals, "all people are Nazis: For the animals it is an eternal Treblinka."

That phrase, "Eternal Treblinka," became the title of a book on the subject by Holocaust educator Charles Patterson, whose Web site links to the PETA campaign.

PETA's tactics are raising the hackles of several Jewish groups and splitting the Jewish animal-rights community.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder and dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, called the Holocaust comparison "ridiculous."

"No responsible Jewish leader will have anything against a campaign that seeks to limit the abuse and torture of animals," Hier said. "But putting on a Web site the images of the death camps, and comparing it to chickens cooped up in a pen, it denigrates the memory of the Holocaust."

The Anti-Defamation League's national director, Abraham Foxman, called the campaign likening animal abuse to Nazism "outrageous" and "abhorrent."

"Rather than deepen our revulsion against what the Nazis did to the Jews, the project will undermine the struggle to understand the Holocaust and to find ways to make sure such catastrophes never happen again," he said.

Ironically, the PETA project first came to the ADL's attention when the animal-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Religious leaders: Shun terror

Religious leaders should not condone terrorism, the Vatican and Israel's chief rabbinate said in a joint declaration. According to the joint statement, released Monday, committing violence in God's name is a "profanation of religion."

The statement came after Vatican officials and Israeli religious leaders met last week near Rome.

Religious reforms spark protest

Israel's fervently Orthodox political parties are vowing to wage a fierce battle against religious reforms outlined in the new government's coalition agreements.

The National Religious Party came under particular criticism for agreeing to the reforms, which include the dismantling of the Religious Affairs Ministry and local religious councils, and arrangements for civil marriage for couples not allowed to wed under Jewish religious law.

United Torah Judaism said the "secular revolution," as it is referred to in the media, is "doomed to fail."

3 questioned in hotel attack

Kenyan police are questioning three people in connection with the November suicide bombing attack of an Israeli-owned hotel in Kenya.

The three members of the family are from the coastal town of Siyu, not far from the site of the hotel. Three Israelis and 11 Kenyans died in the Nov. 28 attack.

Rockets fired at Negev town

Five Israelis were treated for shock after Palestinians fired three Kassam rockets Monday at the Negev town of Sderot.

One of the rockets landed in an open space in a residential neighborhood, Israel Radio reported.



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rights activists sought ADL approval for their effort.

"It's chutzpah enough to compare" the Holocaust and the meat industry, Foxman said, "but to go to the Jewish community is double chutzpah!"

Prescott admitted that the ADL's response "wasn't what we were expecting," though he added that PETA still would seek support from other Jewish groups.

PETA's campaign, meanwhile, has become a meaty issue in the Jewish vegetarian community.

Roberta Kalechofsky, who founded Jews for Animal Rights and has written several books on Jewish vegetarianism, criticized PETA's use of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust "is the end result of a very complicated, theological, historical, evolutionary process that went on for 1,700 years," she said, but PETA's use of the period "is really sucking away all that history."

By drawing the parallel, PETA "reduces the meaning of the Holocaust to physical pain," she added.

Kalechofsky wrote a paper on animal rights and the Holocaust in which she drew a distinction between the motivations of hunters and Nazis.

The Nazis "didn't just want to extinguish Jewish flesh; they wanted to extinguish Jewish civilization," she said.

Prescott replied: "So if people had eaten the flesh of Jews killed in the Holocaust, would that have made it acceptable?"

Richard Schwartz, author of "Judaism and Vegetarianism," long has opposed the use of Holocaust imagery in animal-rights causes, but hoped that PETA's dramatic tactics would focus attention on animal rights.

If PETA's comparison of death camps to factory farms rouses people from their "indifference" to the environmental impact of the meat industry, he said, "why not look at the questions it raises?"

Schwartz said a routine supermarket trip evoked for him "the banality of evil" in which people buy meat "without considering what's behind it."

If Americans reduced their beef consumption by just 10 percent, he claimed, it would free up enough grain now used to feed livestock to feed the 20 million people every year who die of starvation.

Despite his initial hopes for the campaign, Schwartz changed his mind after sensing the "rage" from some Jewish groups and even colleagues.

One Web site, MyJewishLearning.com, gave the debate prominent play.

Schwartz went so far as to urge PETA to issue a "clear and unambiguous" apology for the "deep pain" its Holocaust campaign has caused. He also wants PETA to meet with Jewish groups — he hopes they will add animal rights to their own agendas.

But PETA remains adamant that the "similarities" between the Holocaust and factory farming are worth exploring, Prescott said. "We're trying to widen the circle of compassion, and sometimes a person has to be shocked before they can begin to accept their own role in an act of injustice," he said. □

Israeli accused of smuggling missile parts

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The United States is holding an Israeli businessman on charges that he tried to smuggle missile parts into the United States without declaring their proper value and contents to U.S. Customs inspectors.

David Menashe, 52, managing director of Kam-Tech Systems Ltd. in Tel Aviv, intended to ship the parts to China before his arrest in an undercover operation, according to Mary Carter Andruess, a U.S. assistant attorney.

His lawyer, Donald Etra, said Menashe was innocent of all charges and was a respected member of the Israeli and international business communities.

Menashe's trial is scheduled for April 8.

According to the four-count indictment, Menashe and his company tried to smuggle Hawk Missile and AIM-9 Missile parts into the United States "by falsely representing the value and contents of the packages to avoid detection by customs inspectors."

He disguised the missile parts as "Samples for Evaluation" and undervalued one shipment of an AIM-9 Seeker Section by more than \$19,000, the government charged.

If convicted, Menashe could face up to five years in prison on each of the four counts. □

JEWISH WORLD

Nazi loot panel questioned

A commission investigating Jewish art plundered by the Nazis failed to examine critical data, according to a report in *The New York Times*.

Key members of the Clinton administration's Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States told *The Times* on Monday that the panel's 2000 report, "Plunder and Restitution," noted that the State Department notified U.S. museums about looted art as early as 1946, but did not follow up to see how they responded.

It's not known how many of up to 100,000 art works that the Nazis stole entered the United States via Latin America, Canada and elsewhere. Commission members largely said a lack of time prevented them from delving deeper into the approximately 1 million documents in the National Archives on looted property.

Blair: Britain backs Israel

British Prime Minister Tony Blair reaffirmed his country's support for Israel.

Following several months of tense relations between the two countries, Blair recently told the annual dinner of the Community Security Trust, a British Jewish security organization, that Britain "is a strong and close friend of Israel, not a fair weather friend."

Blair also reiterated his commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Soldiers to mark Shabbat

A handful of U.S. military bases will join an annual campaign to encourage Shabbat observance. Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Belvoir, Va.; Fort Sill, Okla.; and the U.S. Military Academy are among those joining Shabbat Across America on March 7.

More than 700 synagogues from all denominations will participate in a service dedicated to the U.S. Armed Forces. The National Jewish Outreach Program leads the annual campaign to unify the American Jewish community.

Jewish journalists in Moscow

Journalists representing Jewish media outlets from across the former Soviet Union gathered Monday for a conference in Moscow.

During three days of discussions and workshops this week, some 30 participants in the 2nd Annual Conference of Jewish Journalists in the C.I.S. will focus on the role of Jewish press in building community, raising Jewish consciousness and responding to anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli bias in the general media.

The event was organized by the New York-based Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

New head of House panel says she'll go to mat on Israel issues

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA)—When Rep. Benjamin Gilman announced he was retiring from Congress last summer, many on Capitol Hill speculated that the House of Representative's Middle East panel would go with him.

After all, the subcommittee was created in 2001 to give Gilman a forum for his Middle East advocacy when tenure rules forced the New York Republican to turn over the gavel of the House International Relations Committee.

But the subcommittee has been saved, thanks in part to Republican efforts to court the American Jewish community.

The panel's new chair, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), says she is ready to come to the Jewish state's defense.

"I feel great solidarity with the Israeli people," Ros-Lehtinen told JTA recently after leading a congressional delegation to Israel. "I treasure heading this subcommittee and will take it on with a great deal of seriousness."

Officially entitled the House International Relations Committee's subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, in just two years the Mideast panel has become one of the largest forums for lawmakers to express their pro-Israel leanings. Attendance at hearings was impressive, with many members touting their ties to Israel.

That's the reason the subcommittee was maintained, one Democratic congressional staffer said.

"I don't think there's any question that the Republicans are working very hard on outreach to the Jewish community," he said. "And this is a forum to highlight a principle objective of the Republican Party to the Jewish community."

"The continuation of the subcommittee had the potential to be very good or very bad," said Rebecca Needler, a spokeswoman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. "There was no way to predict until the final decisions were made."

Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban refugee in a Miami district with a large Jewish population, is considered a good Republican soldier and a lawmaker with strong ties to AIPAC. She says she lobbied hard to keep the subcommittee and to chair it.

Ros-Lehtinen's priorities coincide with those of the American Jewish community—including securing additional foreign aid and loan guarantees for Israel; punishing the Palestinian Authority and its president, Yasser Arafat; and investigating U.S. funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which helps Palestinian refugees.

Ros-Lehtinen says she's willing to go to the mat on these issues, even when it means taking a stand against the White House. Like its predecessors, the Bush administration has invoked national security waivers to avoid implementing many Congressional initiatives on the Middle East, claiming that implementing the laws could jeopardize the U.S. role as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"I continue to support these things in spite of resistance from the Bush administration," she said. "We hope to pass bills that won't just make a statement, but get necessary funds for Israel."

If an anticipated U.S.-led war against Iraq goes well, Ros-Lehtinen's main job could be building support for the \$4 billion in military aid and \$8 billion in loan guarantees Israel is seeking from the United States after the war.

Ros-Lehtinen replaces a lawmaker whose ties to the Jewish community often seemed stronger than his ties to his own party.

"She doesn't have the institutional ties with the Jewish community that Gilman had," the Democratic official said. "But Mr. Gilman did not have a lot of horse power in the Republican conference."

While Ros-Lehtinen is not Jewish, she is likely to do much of the work on issues of concern to the pro-Israel lobby. That is not a new task for her, however.

Since coming to Congress in 1989, she has done much to further the Jewish community's interests in Florida and across the country.

Ros-Lehtinen "has a time-tested commitment to a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, and has demonstrated she is a true leader when it comes to U.S. policy in the Middle East," Needler said. □

After 13 years of struggle, London gets a Sabbath boundary

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — A rather proper, restrained, British — but clearly audible — gasp of delight went up from the standing-room-only crowd at London's Finchley United Synagogue when the announcement was made:

London's eruv, or Sabbath boundary, would be operating as of Friday, Feb. 28.

"It is hard to believe it is about to become a reality," said Peter Sheldon, the president of Britain's mainstream Orthodox movement, the United Synagogue.

Another case of classic British understatement — since the United Synagogue organization had worked for 13 years to get the eruv up.

London finally has an eruv, a boundary that allows Orthodox Jews to carry some items and push carriages and wheelchairs on the Sabbath.

The 11-mile enclosure in northwest London covers some of the city's most Jewish neighborhoods, including Golders Green and Hendon, plus much of Hampstead Garden Suburb and some of Finchley.

Addressing an audience estimated at more than 1,200 on the Monday night before the eruv "went live," Sheldon described the campaign to erect it as "the stuff of which TV sitcoms are made."

On the face of it, creating an eruv appears to be a simple task.

The idea is to symbolically enclose a public space, making it into "private" space — like one's home — where prohibitions against carrying on the Sabbath do not apply.

Dozens of cities across the United States have them, as do communities in Israel, Europe, and as far away as Sydney and Melbourne, Australia.

So what took so long in London?

Eruv campaigners faced difficulties from all sides, observers say: from property owners and town planning authorities, from less observant Jews who said the eruv would attract fervently Orthodox Jews to their neighborhood and from fervently Orthodox Jews who said it did not meet the standards of halachah, or Jewish law.

Rudi Vis, a local member of Parliament campaigning for re-election in 2001, criticized it as a form of social engineering.

"Nobody ever thought, including ourselves, that this would be up and running," said Rabbi Jeremy Conway, who supervises inspections of the eruv.

Actually drawing the boundaries of the eruv proved surprisingly easy, he told JTA while on an inspection two days before the eruv went live.

Two long artificial boundaries — the M1 highway and London Underground's Northern Line — already border the area with the highest concentration of Jews in north London.

The fences along the two transport corridors make up the eastern and western boundaries of the eruv, he said.

"Joining the two sides was the trick," he said.

Shimon Eider, a New Jersey-based rabbi who is one of the world's foremost experts on eruvim, helped design London's, Conway said.

Jewish law requires that eruv boundaries be unbroken, at least symbolically, and that is where the eruv plan ran into serious difficulties.

There are 34 gaps in the 11-mile boundary, mostly due to roads crossing it.

The normal solution is to build a symbolic door across the gaps so that it is theoretically possible to close them.

Such doors, known as tzures hapesach, generally consist of poles with a wire strung between them.

The London eruv design required the erection of 82 poles — which in turn required planning permission from local councils and residents.

Many people with philosophical objections to the eruv used planning regulations to try to stop it, said Oliver Valins of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, a London think tank.

But patience and perseverance — and a measure of flexibility — won out, Conway said.

"The placement of the poles had to be agreed with householders and councils. We tried to accommodate everyone," he said.

Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu, the head of the London Beit Din, or rabbinic court, explained why eruv planners put so much effort into the project.

"It is incumbent on rabbis to construct eruvim to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath intentionally or accidentally," he said.

Additionally, he said, an eruv brings communities together.

"The essence of an eruv is to unite, to amalgamate. It is about inclusivism, even for those who are not as observant as we are," he said.

Attendees at a lesson Ehrentreu gave on the eruv said it would add to their enjoyment of the Sabbath.

"It means we'll be able to go to my parents for Shabbat," said a young mother of three, who declined to give her name.

But not all Jews support the eruv. A fervently Orthodox group, the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, has banned its members from using the eruv.

"We're not happy with the eruv," a spokesman told JTA. "We're not satisfied with the way the boundaries are set up and we're not satisfied with the way it's being checked."

Conway says his four inspectors will examine the eruv twice a week to make sure it is unbroken.

Eruv organizers will send e-mails and text messages to subscribers every week to let them know the status of the boundary. They will also post information on the eruv Web site by noon each Friday.

Ehrentreu acknowledged that some fervently Orthodox rabbis were not satisfied with the eruv — and he admitted that there are legitimate reasons to have doubts.

"Someone who is consistently scrupulous about fulfilling mitzvot should not use the eruv — but they must not criticize those who do," he said. □

For more about the London eruv, see <http://www.nwllondoneruv.org>.

Money to help protect synagogues

NEW YORK (JTA) — U.S. Jews are donating money to increase security at two synagogues in the former Soviet Union.

The money from the Chicago affiliate of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union will help a synagogue in Nikolaev, Ukraine, and Pinsk, Belarus, buy security systems.

The synagogue in Nikolaev has been attacked six times in the past six years. □