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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel praises Saddam's capture

Israel's president called Saddam's capture "an opening of hope for the free world." Visiting China on Sunday, Moshe Katsav said, "The free world has waged a battle over the right of people in the world to live without fear of terror and has won." [Pages 1, 3]

Islamic Jihad sad on Saddam

Palestinians were "saddened" by Saddam Hussein's capture, Islamic Jihad said.

"The Palestinian people are sad today because the Americans achieved something," Jihad leader Nafiz Azam said in a statement Sunday after the Iraqi dictator's arrest was announced. "But what happened today will not spare the Americans the ambushes they are experiencing. The Iraqi resistance will continue."

The Palestinian Authority, whose president, Yasser Arafat, had maintained a relationship of mutual support with Saddam's regime, did not offer immediate comment. [Pages 1, 3]

Envoy meets with Israelis

U.S. envoy David Satterfield met with top Israeli officials in Jerusalem. Satterfield's meeting Sunday came after he met with Palestinian Authority President Ahmed Qurei a day earlier in the West Bank.

After that meeting, he urged both Palestinians and Israelis to take steps to jump-start peace talks.

Europeans against anti-Semitism

European leaders issued a strong condemnation of anti-Semitism at an E.U. summit meeting last Friday. The declaration, which formed part of a closing statement by European Union heads of state and government, follows a direct request earlier this week by the European Jewish Congress to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose country holds the rotating E.U. presidency.

It also follows concern by European Jewish leaders at a recent decision by the European Commission to squelch a report showing that Muslims and pro-Palestinian groups were linked to the rise of anti-Semitism across the continent. The report later was released under pressure.

At the Brussels summit, E.U. leaders expressed "deep concern at the increase in instances of anti-Semitic intolerance and strongly condemns all manifestations of anti-Semitism."

SADDAM SUCCUMBS

After capture of Saddam, Israelis joyful, Arab world mixed

By Dan Baron

RAMAT GAN, Israel (JTA)— After surviving the Holocaust and five Middle East wars, Ze'ev is a hard man to impress.

But news of Saddam Hussein's capture managed to move the Israeli retiree to tears on Sunday.

"It is good to see Israel a little bit safer," Ze'ev said in his hometown of Ramat Gan as footage of the Iraqi tyrant-turned-prisoner played on television screens at roadside snack stands.

Ramat Gan, where Iraqi Jewish emigres settled en masse in the 1950s, ironically was a main target of Saddam's Scud missiles in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

The capture of the only Arab leader to perpetrate an unanswered strike against the Jewish state generated an upbeat reaction in Israel, buoying the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and resonating at the Defense Ministry.

"The capture of the Iraqi dictator is additional proof that the policies of the free world led by U.S. President George W. Bush are determined to bring to justice all terrorists responsible for killing, destruction and anarchy," Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz wrote in a telegram to his American counterpart, Donald Rumsfeld.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also phoned Bush to offer the president congratulations.

The Arab leaders who still battle Israel were more circumspect.

While Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, a longtime Saddam ally, mulled an official reaction to the news of the capture in Tikrit, Hamas and Islamic Jihad cautioned the West not to rejoice too soon.

"The Americans need to be the lords of the world by eradicating all resistance against them," said Adnan Asfour, a Hamas leader in the West Bank. "I say to the Iraqi people: Observe what the Palestinian people do. Our leaders are assassinated and arrested every day by the Israeli occupiers and that does not stop us from continuing our fight."

In the Gaza Strip border town of Rafah, which sees almost daily fighting between Palestinian gunrunners and Israeli troops, a rally to mark the 16th anniversary of Hamas' funding quickly became a show of support for Saddam.

Children bore posters showing Saddam in better days: uniformed, smiling, an unabashed patron of the Palestinian cause.

Israeli strategic experts agreed that while a quick trial and sentencing for Saddam might calm Iraq, it was unlikely to affect the Palestinian front.

Terrorist attacks against Israel continued even though Saddam's payments to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers stopped after he was deposed in March.

And unlike Saddam, Arafat still enjoys the status of international statesman in most places except Washington.

"What amazes me," said Yuval Steinitz, chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, "is that Saddam can now sit in shackles for his support of terrorism, while archterrorist Arafat remains free."

Some experts warned of a surge in violence by pan-Arab nationalists keen to show they are not cowed by the loss of a major figurehead.

"Those normal citizens who have taken up arms against the Americans in Iraq, and the Islamist extremists who have flocked to help them, might well put up a last fight,"

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli troops kill terrorist

Israeli troops killed an Islamic Jihad fugitive and captured two of his comrades.

Israel's army said a patrol shot the armed terrorist dead Sunday as he approached the Jewish town of Kfar Na'ama in the West Bank.

Two other Islamic Jihad members were later captured nearby. In other violence, Palestinians fired mortars at two Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

IAEA to Israel: Scrap nukes

Israel should destroy its nuclear weapons if it wants real security, according to the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In an interview with the Ha'aretz newspaper, IAEA head Mohamed Elbaradei called on Israel to destroy the weapons it is believed to have as part of a general peace agreement in the Middle East, and to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

He rejected the idea that Israel is safer with nuclear weapons.

Synagogue vs. state in Israel

Israel's Shinui Party is planning to present two bills related to synagogue-state issues.

One bill would concern the legalization of civil marriages; the other relates to the issue of yeshiva students' exemptions for service in Israel's army, the Jerusalem Post reported. Two committees supposed to deal with these issues have yet to meet.

Chasidic Jews to be indicted

Indictments are expected to be filed in Israel against Chasidic Jews who illegally visited Joseph's Tomb in the West Bank.

Seven of the Bratslav Chasidim, who allegedly defied military orders and circumvented a roadblock, were wounded last Friday after a Palestinian gunman fired on their van.



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said Jacky Hugi, Arab affairs correspondent for Israel's daily Ma'ariv.

The parallels between the Iraqi and Palestinian fronts resonated recently with revelations that Israel was exporting its hard-learned counterterrorist tactics to U.S. forces operating in Iraq.

At least one Israeli analyst said he did not approve of the broadcasting of the videotape of Saddam undergoing a medical inspection after his capture.

"It's humiliating and inappropriate," said Moti Kedar of Bar-Ilan University. "You want to win over the Iraqis, not rub their faces in it."

Palestinian Abdallah Abu-Hussein, a 40-year-old West Bank engineer, told Reuters, "I wish all Arab leaders would be hanged, but not by the Americans — by their own people, because they are dictators."

Elsewhere in the Arab world, the news initially was greeted with disbelief. But as it was confirmed, many expressed joy that Saddam would never return to power in Iraq. Others seemed disappointed that he had not fought back against his American captors.

"Saddam is a dictator and the Iraqi people suffered under him, but on the other hand, it was" U.S. forces "that caught him," Mohammed Horani, a member of the Palestinian Authority Parliament, said in the Gaza Strip, according to The Associated Press. "There will be a sense of confusion in the public."

In Yemen, one man said he had expected Saddam to fight back.

"I expected him to resist or commit suicide before falling into American hands," said Mohammed Abdel Qader Mohammadi, 50. "He disappointed a lot of us. He's a coward."

Others celebrated. "Saddam should not be spared. He should get the death penalty, which is the least he deserves," A.P. quoted Rasheed al-Osaimi, a 22-year-old Saudi student, as saying. □

Proposed Anne Frank memorial divides Amsterdam neighborhood

By Manja Ressler

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — It seemed a good idea at the time: a memorial for Anne Frank in front of the apartment building where she lived from 1933 to 1940.

But the proposal soon became mired in controversy.

Actor and film director Jeroen Krabbe — who also is a visual artist — designed the memorial, a sandblasted shadow of Anne playing in front of the building. The long shadow would cover part of the sidewalk and the stoop leading to the entrance of the building at Merwedeplein 37.

Many considered the symbolism clear and appropriate — reflecting the lasting absence of Anne and so many other Jewish children in this neighborhood where many Jews lived before World War II, frozen in time.

However, after a neighborhood meeting last month in which opponents succeeded in thwarting the plan, the local Borough Council decided to examine other options.

After much deliberation and talks with neighborhood residents, the Labor Party proposed a traditional commemorative plaque. Joost Verbeek, leader of the Labor Party faction on the Borough Council, says his consultations in the neighborhood convinced him that most people wanted a simple and modest memorial.

However, the Borough Council meeting where the proposal was to be discussed ended in fighting and name calling. Verbeek, who had taken the initiative for the proposal, was infuriated by a last-minute counterproposal from the Christian Democratic Party for a statue instead of a memorial plaque.

In the end, both proposals were withdrawn, Frank's neighborhood remains without a memorial — and the money for a memorial has been taken off the borough's budget.

The Christian Democratic leader, Evert van den Hout, denies anything amiss with his last-minute proposal for a statue.

"The Labor Party does not have a monopoly on memorials," he told JTA. "If we decide to have a memorial, why not a statue in good likeness? Why modern art?"

Neighborhood activists as well as politicians have called the Borough Council's handling of the issue "shameful," and accuse one another of politicizing the subject.

The Jewish community has not weighed in on the issue. □

JEWISH WORLD

Israel fears U.N. move

Israel is trying to thwart a Palestinian challenge to its U.N. credentials.

Palestinians are trying to "challenge our credentials by claiming that the credentials to Israel only apply to the pre-1967 Israel and not to what is called the 'Occupied Territories,'" Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, told JTA.

It's not the first time Palestinians have tried the tactic, but "obviously this is a very negative development, and we are working with many countries against the move," Mekel said.

He expects the move to come in the form of an amendment next week in the General Assembly.

Istanbul Jews pray

Shabbat services were held last Friday in one of the Istanbul synagogues bombed last month.

Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva, who was injured in one of the blasts, attended the services held in the Beth Israel synagogue. The two Nov. 15 bombings and two others that rocked Istanbul five days later killed 61 people.

Architect pulls out of museum

Architect Frank Gehry quit designing a planned museum for Polish Jewry.

Details about Gehry's departure from the Museum of the History of Polish Jewry, to be built on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto, were not released.

A design competition for the museum now will be held. The Polish government has pledged to fund one-quarter of the museum's \$63 million price tag.

Jews praise Microsoft move

Microsoft removed Nazi symbols that had been placed in its popular Office software suite. Swastikas were found in the "bookshelf" font of Microsoft Office System applications, which Microsoft says was inadvertent. Microsoft has apologized and is issuing a utility that can be added to the system to remove the images from copies of Microsoft Office that already have been sold.

The Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee praised the company for taking the step.

Hillel packs Birthright

Hillel is sending its largest contingent of students on birthright Israel trips since the intifada began. Hillel is running tours for 2,300 students on winter programs of birthright, the free trip to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds who have never been there on a peer tour.

The first Hillel tour leaves Monday.

SADDAM SUCCUMBS

Scud missiles, nuclear strike part of Saddam's history with Israel

By Dina Kraft

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Spewing anti-Israel vitriol was one of Saddam Hussein's specialties.

Of all the leaders in the Arab world, the Iraqi dictator seemed to have the most to say against Israel and he seemed to say it the most often.

Now that he has been captured and faces possible trial, experts are asking whether or not the Jewish state will again be his target of choice.

"It will be interesting to see if he chooses to attack Israel this time, not with Scuds but verbally," said Martin Kramer, a research fellow at Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center. "Historically, when he found himself up against the wall, his usual method was to divert and deflect attention to Israel."

After attacking Israel in the 1991 Gulf War, Hussein became fond of saying that the Iraqi people represented 22 million missiles against Israel.

It was Hussein's rhetoric against Israel that "was the main glue for the Iraqis for developing national Iraqi feelings, and remained so until the very end," said Ofra Bengio, a professor of Middle East history at Tel Aviv University. "Hussein wanted to be able to mobilize the population around Israel as the symbol of evil."

In 1969, soon after Saddam was appointed Iraq's vice president, the government hanged 17 alleged spies, 11 of whom were Jewish, in what is perceived as Saddam's first message to Israel that he was a force with which to be reckoned.

The animosity continued in the 1970s, when Israel provided covert military training and support for Iraq's Kurds in their struggle against Baghdad. The enmity intensified in 1981 with Israel's airstrike on Iraq's nuclear facility at Osirak, outside Baghdad.

Israeli officials defended the strike in the face of worldwide condemnation, arguing that Saddam's regime was attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Years later, some of the same voices that condemned Israel in 1981 said the strike had been the right move.

Out of all the Iraqi-Israeli recriminations, Hussein was proudest of Iraq's firing of Scud missiles on the Jewish state during the Persian Gulf War. Casualties and damage from the attacks were minimal, but the rain of missiles caused Israelis trauma.

For the first time in the country's history, Israel did not strike back when attacked. Instead, the Israelis, many of them survivors of persecution elsewhere, hid in their sealed rooms with gas masks while the government heeded a request by the United States — which was trying to keep intact its alliance with the Arab world against Saddam — not to counterattack.

Saddam's power lay in part in his image and forceful rhetoric, said Bengio, author of "Saddam's World." Saddam "managed to put Israeli society into a panic for more than a decade. There was no basis for such hysteria, but he managed to do it," she said.

But a serious Iraqi military threat never materialized, she said, because Saddam's relations with the Syrians and Jordanians was not good enough for common cause.

Making Israel the focus of his diatribes was politically profitable for Saddam. Presenting himself as a leader of the Arab world, Hussein could use anti-Israeli sentiment to rally Arabs behind him.

He was seen by many in the Arab street as a hero for taking bold stands against Israel and the United States. While other Arab nations entered into peace talks with Israel and acceded to U.S. pressure, Hussein stood firm with his belligerent stance.

The Palestinians cheered Saddam for supporting them, even when the Scuds he fired at Israel endangered them as well.

Most recently, Hussein enraged Israel during the current intifada by sending reward money to the families of suicide bombers who perpetrated attacks against Israelis.

There was, however, a brief period in the 1980s, under Yitzhak Rabin's government, when high-level contacts took place between Israel and Iraq.

Led by Moshe Shaval, an Iraqi-born Israeli Cabinet minister, the secret talks aimed at securing minimal relations between the two countries and permitting return visits to Iraq by Israeli Jews from Iraq. The talks collapsed shortly after they began. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Proposals on kipot, Yom Kippur get mixed reaction by French Jews***By Philip Carmel*

PARIS, Dec. 14 (JTA) — Most children in France are likely to get an extra school holiday come next October — and it could be Yom Kippur.

On Oct. 6, 2004, the 10th of Tishri, 5765, every child who studies in a state school could get the day off for the holiest Jewish day of the year.

A proposal to make Yom Kippur, together with the Muslim Festival of the Sacrifice, Eid al-Adhar, national school holidays is just one of a series of radical recommendations contained in the final report of a presidential commission set up to examine how the secular values that lie at the heart of the French Republic can be adapted to a multicultural society.

The creation earlier this year of the Stasi Commission by President Jacques Chirac principally was an admission that previous laws and norms were no longer applicable in a society with a wide ethnic mix.

More specifically, however, it was a recognition that France now has to deal with a large Muslim community whose lack of acceptance of the secular values of the French state is creating controversy. Most recently, the conflict has resulted in a number of expulsions and suspensions of young Muslim women for attending state schools wearing Muslim head or face scarves.

Recently, local councils have taken some liberties with France's strict secular guidelines by allowing separate swimming times at municipal swimming pools. In such instances, Muslims and Orthodox Jews often both benefit, since they share some of the same religious restrictions.

Traditionally, though, French law has been vague on many of the issues now under scrutiny.

When it comes to wearing religious insignia in public schools, for example, school principals have had discretion up to now to decide what constitutes "an ostentatious religious sign" and can be banned from the school.

But as Muslims increasingly have been associated with Islamic extremism and urban violence in France, calls have been growing for banning Muslim head coverings in public institutions in the country.

And as the legislation is framed to apply equally to all of France's citizens, politicians from across the spectrum have called for a ban on all religious insignias in schools.

Most French Jewish leaders support the legislation and have long accepted the principle that if the scarf must go, yarmulkes should go, too.

Community leaders largely welcomed the Stasi Commission's recommendations Dec. 11.

In its report, the commission said it favored a ban on all symbols that "manifested religious or political affiliation," including "visible religious signs such as the large cross, Muslim scarf and the kippah."

However, the report said, the ban should not include things like "pendants, little crosses, stars of David, hands of Fatima or little Korans."

Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews, said the idea "is not a bad decision, but respect for

the secular nature of the French state does not need a law."

Cukierman said that while he has no position on the specific ban against yarmulkes, he understands that the law must be fair.

"This ban is a body blow to Islamic fanaticism," he said.

Cukierman was not enthusiastic about the proposal to make Yom Kippur a school holiday, although he said the move would not threaten France's secular nature.

Yonatan Arfi, president of the French Union of Jewish Students, a body which has long campaigned for a total ban on religious signs, said he opposes making Yom Kippur a national holiday for students.

"This is not a good idea when more than half of the schools in France don't have any Jews in them," Arfi said.

He said he welcomed the ban on religious insignia as a way "to protect republican institutions against the threat of extremists."

Orthodox leaders were upset that yarmulkes would be included in a ban.

In an interview with the daily *Le Figaro* shortly before the commission's findings were published, France's chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, who is Orthodox, said he opposes legislation to ban the Muslim scarf.

Sitruk said he fears the prohibition "could lead to a ban on all religious signs."

But in recent weeks, Sitruk has allowed that the yarmulke may not be compatible with the values of the secular state. He said he removes his yarmulke when voting "as a mark of respect for the republic."

In testimony to the Stasi Commission, Jean Kahn, president of the Central Consistoire, France's principal Jewish religious organization, said that "all religious signs, from whatever group, should be excluded from schools."

But other Consistoire officials have moved closer to the position of the chief rabbi.

After the publication of the Stasi recommendations, Leon Masliah, a senior adviser to Kahn, told JTA it was "sad to see the kippah banned when it has never posed any problem."

He said, "In effect, the kippah has become the second victim of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in France."

Several weeks ago, Sitruk called on Jewish students to wear caps instead of yarmulkes in public so as not to invite anti-Semitic violence.

Rabbi Chaim Shneur Nisenbaum, a Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi from Paris, told JTA in New York that he disagreed with that recommendation.

"The situation is not as bad as people write," he said, referring to news reports on anti-Semitism in France. "Every Jew needs to have Jewish pride. We don't want to be modern-day Marranos."

"When a Jew wants to hide, he has more problems than if he were to go on the street with a kippah," he said.

Masliah said that the main problem for Jewish students in state schools is increasing verbal and physical violence.

He added that the argument over yarmulkes in state schools is largely theoretical, since those who wear yarmulkes usually go to Jewish schools.

Many observers say there is a quid pro quo at work here. If the state institutes the ban on religious insignia, it must make a concomitant gesture of religious tolerance. Hence, the proposal to make Yom Kippur or Eid al-Adhar a school holiday. □

(JTA News Editor Uriel Heilman in New York contributed to this report.)