

IN THE NEWS

Israeli Cabinet OKs revised plan on Gaza

Israel's Cabinet approved a revised version of Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

Sunday's 14-7 vote came after days of political wrangling over the plan. The plan was revised in recent days so that the Cabinet could approve a withdrawal in principle without voting on actually dismantling any Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip or West Bank.

Barghouti sentenced to 165 years in prison

Palestinian militia leader Marwan Barghouti was sentenced to 165 years in prison.

On Sunday, a Tel Aviv court sentenced the Fatah leader to five life terms in prison, one for each person murdered in shootings Barghouti was found guilty of planning. In addition to the 25-year life sentences, Barghouti got 20 years for ordering a failed car bombing in Jerusalem and another 20 for belonging to a terrorist organization, the Al-Aksa Brigade, which claimed responsibility for those attacks.

Yeshiva student stabbed near Paris

A yeshiva student was injured in a knife attack near Paris. Yisrael Yiftah, 17, was stabbed in the chest outside the Mekor Yisrael Yeshiva last Friday afternoon by an assailant described by witnesses as a man of North African origin.

Before losing consciousness, Yiftah told police that the man had shouted "Allahu akbar," or "God is Great," before stabbing him. The attacker then attempted to strike other students at the yeshiva with a screwdriver before fleeing.

Yiftah's condition was described by a hospital spokesman as serious. A man was arrested late Saturday night in connection with the attack. Police say he is also linked to at least two other assaults last Friday on men of Arab and Haitian origin.

WORLD REPORT

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Despite occasional disagreements, Reagan supported Jewish causes

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ronald Reagan's presidency was a time when U.S. Jewish power grew to new levels of influence — and when Jews learned of its limits.

Thanks to Reagan, who died Saturday at age 93 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's, the years 1981-1989 saw the consolidation of bipartisan support for the causes Jews held dearest: a secure Israel and the freedom of Soviet Jews.

It also saw the Republican Party become an acceptable option for Jews, ensuring that no single party could take the Jewish vote for granted.

"Historians will look back and say the Reagan years were the years the Jewish community looked back and tried the Republican Party on for size," said Marshall Breger, Reagan's liaison to the Jewish community from 1983 to 1985. "That began the process of developing a comfort level which is now only coming to fruition. The Reagan administration turned the Jews into a two-party community."

Yet Reagan also dealt the Jewish community two severe blows when he triumphed in pushing through Congress the sale of powerful spy planes to Saudi Arabia and when he delivered a forgive-and-forget paean at the Bitburg cemetery in Germany, where Nazi SS troops are buried.

Also, some analysts have said the Reagan administration created the problems that beset domestic issues important to many Jews, such as abortion rights, poverty relief and government medical assistance.

Despite such issues, Reagan's presidency

now is seen by many as halcyon days for foreign policy, principally because of the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

"The end of the Cold War was important not just for the free world but for diminishing the cause of rejectionist Arab states and enabling Soviet Jews to be free," said David Makovsky, then a leading Soviet Jewry activist and now a top Middle East analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "We can only be grateful for this."

Mark Levin, also a prominent Soviet Jewry activist in those days, emphasized that the benefits the struggle for Soviet Jewry derived from Reagan's crusade against the "Evil Empire" were not incidental; for Reagan, Soviet Jewish freedom was central to the struggle.

Reagan made sure Soviet Jewry was a priority at each meeting between U.S. Soviet officials, along with nuclear disarmament and economic assistance, recalled Levin, now the executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia.

Reagan also earned Jewish admiration for appointing secretaries of state who were sympathetic to Israel, Alexander Haig and George Schultz.

But the president's visceral sympathy for Israel was undermined by his uneasy relations with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The leaders' styles inevitably clashed: the avuncular, give-me-the-big-picture movie star versus the proper European-born lawyer. "There were many misreadings," Breger recalled.

When Begin said "no problem" about

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ *Despite occasional disagreements, Reagan advocated for Jewish causes*

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settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, Reagan assumed Israel was agreeing to a freeze; but Begin merely was saying, with characteristic confidence, that the settlements should not pose a problem.

The first real crisis of Israel ties during Reagan's presidency was occasioned by Israel's attack in June 1981 on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor.

Reagan said Iraq, which the United States then supported, may have been persuaded to use the nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes, and he suspended arms shipments to Israel in response.

Reagan also resented the lobbying by Israel and its supporters against the sale of AWACS spy planes to Saudi Arabia in 1981. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, outraged that Reagan was renegeing on a campaign promise so soon after his election, got the House of Representatives to oppose the sale.

When the battle went to the Senate, Reagan, eager for a triumph with an irascible Congress, played hardball. He and his aides raised the specter of dual loyalty charges. On Oct. 1 of that year, Reagan famously said "It is not the business of other nations to make American foreign policy."

The AWACS sale triumphed in the Senate, and the apparent succumbing to warnings about excessive Jewish influence was a shock for a pro-Israel community that had been confident in its influence since the Yom Kippur war.

Reagan attempted to make amends

after the vote by proposing a strategic relationship with Israel in November 1981. Begin and the Knesset surprised Reagan a month later by annexing the Golan Heights, territory claimed by Syria. Reagan withdrew his offer.

Less than a year later, in June 1982, tempers flared again when Israel invaded Lebanon in order to oust the PLO from its stronghold there.

Later, Reagan formulated a plan not only to pull Israeli troops out of Lebanon, but to force Israel into withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza. Ultimately, resistance by the Likud Party-led Cabinet killed the plan.

Only days later, Israel's Christian allies in Lebanon, the Phalangists, raided a Palestinian refugee camp and slaughtered hundreds of civilians there. The ensuing controversy over the degree of Israel's responsibility poisoned Israel's image in the West.

Reagan reacted to the event, known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre, by creating a multinational force to help keep the peace in Lebanon.

When a suicide attack the following summer in Lebanon killed 241 U.S. Marines, some blamed Israel for dragging the United States into the conflict there. In truth, Israeli officials had tried hard to persuade Reagan not to deploy troops to the region.

The attack on the Marine barracks created an impression that would dog Israel throughout the 1980s: Israel somehow was responsible for anti-American terrorism.

Despite such tensions, affection for Reagan persisted among Jews. He earned a respectable 31 percent of the Jewish vote in the 1984 elections, though it did not match the 39 percent he had won in 1980, when many Jews voted to oust President Carter.

The most serious test of Reagan's ties to the Jews came when he announced in April 1985 that he would visit Bitburg, a World War II military cemetery.

U.S. Jews were stunned, especially when they learned that more than 40 members of the Waffen SS were buried at Bitburg. Not even a personal appeal from Elie Wiesel, America's best-known Holo-

caust survivor, could dissuade Reagan.

The failure to keep Reagan from Bitburg was another reminder of the limits of organized Jewish suasion.

But again, Jewish ire eventually dissipated because of the bigger picture that encompassed Reagan's friendliness to Jews.

"With Reagan, you had disagreements but you couldn't get angry with him," recalled Hyman Bookbinder, then the Washington director of the American Jewish Committee. "That explains a lot of the comity."

On the domestic front, Reagan often was accused of clumsiness when it came to understanding minorities, but acted swiftly whenever anyone close to him expressed outright bigotry.

Reagan promised social reforms to Christian conservatives, but he never pursued those pledges with great enthusiasm. In 1982, he introduced a school prayer amendment but let it die in Congress; in 1987, he did little to stop the steamrolling of his Supreme Court candidate, Robert Bork.

Still, the symbolic weight he gave to the ideas of the Christian right, through repeated appearances with its leaders and through his speeches, gave that constituency access to power that it otherwise might not have had.

"He set the stage over many of the battles over social issues, choice, marriage amendment, school prayer," said Mark Pelavin, then a legislative assistant with the American Jewish Congress and now the associate director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

Pelavin said the Christian right and small-government advocates gained their first footholds with Reagan.

"The whole anti-poverty agenda, the whole idea of trickle-down economics, making people stronger by supporting them less — it hasn't proven true," Pelavin said.

Still, that did not diminish Reagan's other achievements, Pelavin said.

"The end of the Cold War, strengthening the U.S.-Israel alliance — he was a pivotal figure and his achievements will be long-lasting," he said.

(JTA correspondent Matthew E. Berger in Washington contributed to this report.)

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THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem, launches a book tour in the Washington area touting his account of the 2002 standoff between Palestinian fugitives and Israeli troops at the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem. Publisher Fortress Press is likening Raheb, who will speak at a number of churches, to Holocaust diarist Anne Frank.

TUESDAY

■ The G8 summit of industrialized nations begins in Sea Island, Ga. A host of Arab leaders have been invited and will discuss President Bush's proposals for democratic reform in the Middle East. A statement announcing the summit initially ignored the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the issue was added after Arab representatives argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contributes to instability in the Middle East.

■ Rep. Jim Moran (D-Va.) faces a primary challenge from Andy Rosenberg, a Jewish lawyer from Alexandria, Va. Moran, who has stirred controversy among Jews by making remarks some perceived as anti-Semitic, is favored to win.

■ Jewish outreach advocates gather in Boston through Thursday for Jewish Outreach Institute conference. Spokesman Paul Golin says the summit will focus on ways to bring outreach "outside the four walls" of Jewish institutions and "into public spaces." A "mock" Jewish film festival will be held to show one way of reaching uninvolved Jews.

■ Leading historians gather in Washington through Thursday for the 2004 Biennial Scholar's Conference on American Jewish History at the American University and Library of Congress. Among the historians on hand will be Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University, Gary Zola of the American Jewish Archives, Michael Feldberg of the American Jewish Historical Society, Michael Grunberger of the Library of Congress, Deborah Dash Moore of Vassar College, and Hasia Diner of New York University.

FRIDAY

■ Three Israeli documentaries are among the 25 films premiering at the 15th annual Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in New York, which runs through June 24. "A Kiss Is a Kiss Is a Kiss" is about kissing across the Israeli-Palestinian divide, "One Shot" is about Israeli army snipers, and "Paradise Lost" is about a Palestinian fishing village in Israel. A Canadian film, "Discordia," documents the violence at Montreal's Concordia University during a visit there by former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Belzec camp memorial opens

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Norbert Dikales, 75, walked down a pathway that goes 30 feet below ground and descended into a nightmare.

For the first time in his life last week, Dikales, of Bethesda, Md., was visiting the notorious Belzec death camp in Poland, where his parents and most of his family were killed. They were among an estimated 600,000 Jews exterminated there between 1942 and 1943 in the most brutal Nazi killing camp outside of Auschwitz.

Dikales went to Belzec to attend the opening ceremony June 3 of a new \$5 million memorial to mark the murders, and he descended into the site on a walkway behind some 400 Israeli army officers.

"I wish my parents could have seen this," he said in a phone interview from Belzec, his voice breaking.

The ceremony drew about 1,000 people, including Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski, top officials from Israel, Germany and the United States, and several hundred Holocaust survivors and their families.

The opening of the memorial not only opened a new chapter for the once-ignored site, but — for now — ended a highly charged debate over the memorial's construction.

The three-hour ceremony, broadcast live on Polish TV, capped a multiyear battle over whether the 600-foot pathway Dikales and others walked down desecrates the remains of the dead.

The ramp, and the trench dug to construct it, cut through an area suffused with bone shards and ash, left over from when the Nazis burned their victims in an attempt to hide the murders of Jews deported from the nearby region of Galicia.

Opposition to the memorial ramp began in 1998 when builders began test drilling at the site to determine where the human remains lay so they could be avoided during construction.

Last year Rabbi Avi Weiss, president of the New York-based Amcha-The Coalition for Jewish Concerns, went to Belzec to try to block bulldozer operators from working

on the memorial. Weiss said the construction was unearthing yet more Jewish remains.

Even as the memorial opened, Weiss, who has a U.S. federal lawsuit pending against the memorial, vowed to continue his efforts. "It's not over," Weiss told JTA. "There will be serious study and investigation of the trench, and I intend to continue to speak out to make sure this never happens again."

At the ceremony, Kwasniewski said, "This whole Jewish universe of Galicia was wiped off the map and buried in this grave," The Associated Press reported.

The site had been neglected for decades. The remains of the dead were left to the mercy of the elements, trash covered

the empty fields and residents of nearby towns would use the area as a pedestrian shortcut.

The memorial, a project funded in equal parts by the Polish government and private donations raised by the American Jewish Committee, was meant to

mark and protect the remaining evidence of the killings that took place there. The building consists of the controversial ramp surrounded by walls inscribed with the names of some of the victims of what the AJCommittee said was the first Nazi gas chamber.

"The monument is the emotional equivalent of the Vietnam memorial" in Washington, said Barry Jacobs, director of strategic studies for the AJCommittee.

Solomon Redner, 74, of Philadelphia, said the memorial and the debate behind its construction means little compared to the fact that he lost his grandparents and other relatives there.

Redner, who as a child lived and hid in the Jewish ghetto of the city of Lvov, some 50 miles away, said only one thing went through his mind during the ceremony.

"For me, it was a cemetery of my family," he told JTA after the Belzec ceremony.

Dikales said his family was visibly moved by the ceremony, especially when rabbis and cantors recited Kaddish.

"How can you express the horror of more than half a million people killed in one little place?" he said. ■

'This whole Jewish universe of Galicia was wiped off the map and buried in this grave.'

Alexander Kwasniewski

Poland's president

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Syria blames Israel for sanctions

Syria accused Israel of engineering U.S. sanctions against it. "The Syria Accountability Act runs counter to international law, and it was Israel that managed to pass it through Congress," Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara told a Kuwaiti newspaper Sunday, referring to sanctions President Bush enacted last month.

But the newspaper, Al-Qabbas, also quoted Shara as inviting Israel to restart peace talks where they stalled in 2000, with a Syrian demand for the return of all the Golan Heights.

Israel has ruled out preconditions in any negotiations with Syria.

Settlers suspected in attacks

West Bank settlers are suspected in two attacks on Palestinians.

Israeli police sources said Saturday that five female settlers were believed to have attacked a Palestinian girl near the Hazon David outpost, lightly injuring her. The girl did not press charges.

In a separate weekend incident, a West Bank Jewish youth was arrested on suspicion of stoning Palestinian-owned sheep with his friends.

Rally for Gaza pullback

Thousands took part in a Jerusalem demonstration calling for Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

"Listen to the majority of the public: Bring Israel home," Israel's former military chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, told a crowd of about 3,000 outside Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's official residence Saturday night.

Some of the demonstrators, who had marched through the capital, were encouraged to sign a petition endorsing the "Geneva accord," an unofficial Israeli-Palestinian peace proposal.

Rabbi sought over incitement

Israeli police are hunting for a rabbi who allegedly called for attacking those who try to dismantle any Jewish settlements.

Police said Sunday that several computers belonging to the banned right-wing group Kach had been confiscated and analyzed to determine the source of the rabbinical ruling that appeared on them.

Kach members brought in for questioning refused to cooperate, police said.

Gere pushes peace

Actor Richard Gere visited Israel and met with Palestinian officials. Gere, on his third private peace mission, met Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei at his office in Abu Dis on Saturday.

"I consider myself your brother," the Palestinian newspaper Al-Ayyam quoted Gere as telling Qurei.

The actor then went to Tel Aviv to open Tel Aviv University's international student film festival. "To me, it is very, very moving to be with you here, to feel the love and the passion and the total nonviolence that film represents," Gere told an audience there.

NORTH AMERICA

Jews protest award to U.N. high commissioner

B'nai Brith Canada protested the awarding of an honorary degree to the U.N. official who oversaw an anti-Semitic U.N. conference. The former U.N. high commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson, who received an honorary doctorate from McGill University, presided over the 2001 U.N. World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, which turned into an anti-Semitic and anti-Israel event. B'nai

Brith held a demonstration last Friday at the university during the award ceremony.

The 2001 conference that Robinson oversaw "gave voice to some of the worst demonstrations of anti-Semitism and attacks against Israel in more than 50 years," said B'nai Brith Canada's executive vice president, Frank Dimant. "To date, Mrs. Robinson accepts no responsibility for the conference's racist stance against Israel and the Jewish people and, in fact, insists that much good came from it."

Canada wants to keep Palestinian refugee out

Canada refused to give permanent-resident status to a Palestinian refugee linked to the PLO.

Nawal Haj Khalil, who has been living in Ottawa with her two children since 1994, is challenging a federal law that brands her a terrorist threat because of her association with the PLO.

Khalil once worked as a journalist on a magazine that has been deemed part of the PLO's propaganda machine. She says she was exercising her right of free speech as a journalist when she worked for the PLO media outlet, which advocated violence against Israel.

Khalil's husband lives in the West Bank and she must attain permanent-resident status to be able to sponsor him to join the family in Canada.

As a refugee, she is free to stay in Canada but may not be readmitted if she leaves.

WORLD

Sharon welcomes birthright students

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon welcomed this summer's birthright Israel students.

"We always have some worries here, but when I see you, I hear you, I know there is no reason to worry," Sharon told thousands of young Jewish adults from all over the world gathered at Jerusalem's International Conference Center on Sunday.

The program sends Jews aged 18 to 26 on free trips to Israel.

Alleged basketball murders an issue

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is calling for Lithuania to probe evidence about the participation of the country's basketball players in a wartime massacre of Jews.

The center protested after the Lithuanian prosecutor dismissed evidence last week that the Perkunas team killed Jews as a prize for defeating a German team in a July 1941 exhibition game.

German Greens withdraw poster

The Green Party in Germany withdrew a campaign poster with an anti-Israel slogan.

A representative of the Green Party, which is a partner in Germany's government coalition, apologized to Israel's ambassador to Germany, Shimon Stein, for a European Parliament campaign poster featuring a photograph of a peace march in London, where a banner says "Victory to the Intifada." The elections are scheduled for June 13.

Israel not just a dream for contest winners

A 14-year-old Jewish girl from Ukraine won first prize in a drawing contest based on Torah stories.

Olga Mozharova, from the city of Donetsk, won for her drawing "Joseph's Dream." The competition, which was launched in early 2003, attracted more than 900 participants from the Or Avner system of Jewish day schools, a Chabad-run educational network in the region. Olga and three other winners in the contest received free tickets to Israel and a free tour of biblical sites in the Jewish state.