

IN THE NEWS

Sharon firm on no referendum

Ariel Sharon rejected calls by four Israeli Cabinet ministers for a referendum on his Gaza withdrawal plan.

"I will never give in to pressures and threats, nor accept any ultimatums," the Israeli prime minister told Ha'aretz on Wednesday, referring to a pledge by the ministers, who include Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Education Minister Limor Livnat, to resign in two weeks unless Sharon agrees to a referendum on withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

Annan agrees to report on Sudan

Kofi Annan promised that the United Nations would issue a daily report about deaths in refugee camps in Sudan's Darfur region.

The U.N. secretary-general made the pledge in a meeting Wednesday in New York with interfaith leaders, including Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel; Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service; Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; and Sara Bloomfield, director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

During the meeting, Bloomfield invited Wiesel and Annan to talk about the issue of violence in Sudan at the Holocaust museum, though Annan did not formally accept the invitation.

Sharon marks Rabin assassination

Ariel Sharon apologized for any incitement that may have led to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

"Our disputes were never personal, they were for the greater good," the Israeli prime minister said at a Jerusalem memorial marking the ninth anniversary of his predecessor's slaying.

"If, in the heat of the real argument, things were said which should not have been said, I regret it."

WORLD REPORT

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10 years after Israel-Jordan peace, no celebrations mark the milestone

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ten years ago this week, in the midst of a desert storm in the Arava valley, the late King Hussein of Jordan and the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel signed a peace accord ushering in an era of hope that relations between the neighbors would become a model for a new Middle East.

The 10th anniversary of that momentous day went by this week with little fanfare and no official celebrations marking the milestone.

What happened?

The Israel-Jordan peace agreement was like the official marriage of a couple that had been carrying on a secret relationship for years. The leaders of both countries sighed with relief, pleased that they would no longer have to hide their affair.

Today, ties between Israel and its eastern neighbor are not at their best. This, though, has less to do with the couple itself not getting along than it does with tension inside the "family"

— the Arab world, that is, and in particular the Palestinians, who comprise two-thirds of Jordan's 5.5 million population.

"We cannot ignore what's happening in the West Bank and Gaza, neither can we ignore terrorism," Marwan Mu'ashar, Jordan's foreign minister, told Israeli journalists in Amman recently.

The Israel-Jordan peace deal was followed by inflated optimism. Rosy scenarios envisaged other countries in the Middle East following suit, the economies of both countries prospering, the border opening up for mutual tourism and trade thriving — and spilling over

from Jordan to the rest of the Arab world.

But this week in Amman, Israeli Ambassador Ya'acov Hadas sat in a fortified embassy, totally isolated from the local political community, lamenting the stagnation in relations.

Meanwhile, masses of Jordanians marked the anniversary by demonstrating against ties with the Jewish state.

"Our relations are like the relations between a couple," Hadas said in an interview with the Ma'ariv newspaper. "We have ups and downs, quarrels and appeasements."

The "downs" are the result primarily of the collapse of the peace process with the Palestinians and, long before that, the emergence of a strong anti-Israeli lobby in Jordan.

The first widely publicized misunderstanding took place in 1996, two years after the peace agreement, when Israel opened a new exit to an archaeological tunnel next to the Western Wall.

Palestinians claimed Israel was trying to collapse the mosques on the Temple Mount. As a result of the incitement, Palestinian Authority security forces faced off against Israeli soldiers, leaving some 70 people dead.

Later that year came Israel's botched assassination attempt on Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal in downtown Amman. Then, in March 1997, a Jordanian soldier opened fire on a group of teenaged Israeli girls on a field trip along the border, killing seven. The soldier became a hero in Jordan, and Jordanians were outraged when King Hussein apologized to the girls' families.

Relations really took a turn for the worse after September 2000, when the Palestinian intifada began. Two Israeli diplomats were

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■ *The state of Israeli-Jordanian peace, a decade after accord*

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injured in shooting attacks, and an Israeli businessman was murdered in Jordan in August 2001.

Jordan is particularly perturbed by construction of Israel's West Bank security barrier, which Jordan says jeopardizes its own security by prompting fears of a new influx of Palestinians.

Israeli bureaucracy and lack of initiative bears some of the blame for the stagnation in relations between the two countries.

A case in point: Eight years ago Jordan and Israel signed an agreement on special arrangements for the neighboring Red Sea port towns of Aqaba and Eilat.

The agreement stipulated that Israel and Jordan would cooperate on issues relating to the two cities. There was talk of cooperation on environmental management, pest control, flood management, town zoning and land use policies, energy and natural resources, emergency response services, and the promotion of binational and multinational events.

The agreement also called for the establishment of a Special Tourism Zone in the region, in which cross-border tourism would be encouraged by simplifying crossing procedures; a binational Special Economic Zone; and a binational Red Sea Marine Peace Park.

All were dreams. All remained on paper.

Shimon Shamir, a former Israeli ambassador to Jordan, once spoke of an agreement to transport merchandise by truck from Jordan to the port of Haifa. The

agreement was delayed because government ministries could not agree which of them would cover the approximately \$110 cost for the police motorcyclist to escort the motorcade.

According to Israel's Tourism Ministry, some 150,000 Israelis visited Jordan last year; the vast majority of them Israeli Arabs. Some 18,400 Jordanians visited Israel.

But the main obstacle to normalization between the two countries is located in Jordan.

Since the signing of the peace treaty in 1994, Jordan's monarchy has tried to maneuver carefully between its reliance on Israel as the behind-the-scenes guarantor of the regime and its desire to maintain close ties with the Arab world, which frowns on friendly relations with the Jewish state.

Shortly after the peace treaty was signed, Jordan's powerful trade unions formed an anti-normalization committee that essentially ruins the career of anyone cooperating with Israel.

Tareq Al-Humaidi, a Jordanian journalist who published "The Voice of Peace," a local pro-peace newspaper, was threatened and condemned by the anti-normalization committee. When he tried to take the committee to court, the Jordanian Bar Association disbarred Humaidi's lawyer.

The committee has operated mafia-style, and Jordanian authorities have done very little to counter this activity, thus legitimizing the strong anti-Israeli feelings in Jordan.

"The situation becomes more and more difficult," Aharon Efroni, an Israeli businessman told JTA this week.

Efroni, a Jew born in Iraq, makes a living bringing together businessmen from both countries.

"Unlike the past, Jordanian businessmen insist that no mention of Israel and no Hebrew will appear on documents I present," he said. "I make a point of not spending nights in Jordan, although I have not received any threats."

Still, according to an official statement from Israel's Foreign Ministry on the oc-

casation of the anniversary, Israel regards Jordan as "an island of regional stability."

Mutual trade between the two countries rose from \$13 million in 1996 to \$130 million in 2003. Israel now holds the sixth spot on Jordan's export list.

Jordan's exports to Israel reached \$130 million in the first seven months of this year, an increase of 15 percent over the same period last year. Israeli exports to Jordan made an even greater leap, increasing in the same period by \$78 million, a rise of 40 percent.

But the most important "peace fruit" for Jordan has been the Qualified Industrial Zone agreement with Israel. Under the deal, if Jordan and Israel work together on products in the designated area, the products can enter the U.S. duty free.

Thanks to the industrial zone, Jordan has increased its exports to the United States by more than 10 times, making the United States the No. 1 destination for Jordanian exports. Annual Jordanian exports to the United States are expected to reach the \$1 billion mark at the end of this year, compared to \$40 million just five years ago.

This has relieved unemployment in the northern Irbid region, creating some 30,000 new jobs.

Israeli textile factories moved to Jordan, and Israeli high-tech companies employ several dozen Jordanian programmers who do their work in Jordan. Likewise, the two countries continue to develop joint water and tourism projects.

There also is a strong, if relatively unadvertised, security relationship between the two neighbors. Their intelligence services operate in close cooperation, including security patrols along their border.

In a hopeful development this week, an Israeli-Jordanian committee met to discuss construction of a new joint academic center in the Arava region.

The committee will map out a site for the "Bridging the Rift" binational university. Construction work on the new campus is scheduled to begin by the middle of next year.



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In Florida, Cuban Jews poised to vote for GOP

By LARRY LUXNER

MIAMI (JTA) — Jaime Suchlicki and Bernardo Benes both were born in Cuba, they're both academics associated with Miami-based think tanks and they're both Jewish.

That's where the similarities end.

Suchlicki, director of the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies, is a staunch supporter of President Bush and the 45-year-old U.S. trade embargo against the Castro government in Cuba.

Benes, founder of the non-profit group Cuban Americans for Change, says those policies make no sense and that "our main objective is to defeat President Bush and kick him out of the White House."

Such opposing sentiments illustrate the dilemma faced by South Florida's 10,000 or so Jewish voters of Cuban descent. While their American Jewish brethren in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties are expected to vote overwhelmingly for Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) — following an American Jewish tradition of voting Democratic — Cuban Jews have a different agenda.

"The majority of Cuban Jews will sup-

port Bush, in part because of his Cuba policy but also because of Bush's support for Israel," said Suchlicki, 64, the son of Jewish immigrants from Poland who left his native Cuba in 1960, a year after Fidel Castro came to power.

"I think you're going to see a move away from Kerry by the Jewish community," he said. "I can't predict by what quantity, but there's going to be stronger support for Bush this time by both" Cuban and non-Cuban Jews.

On the other hand, the Bush administration's recent crackdown on family travel to Cuba could backfire among less conservative elements of the community.

The move infuriated Cubans of both parties, with Kerry immediately attacking the Bush policy as anti-family and promising to rescind it if elected. Shortly afterward, Joe Garcia, executive director of the 20,000-member, conservative Cuban American National Foundation, resigned to campaign for Kerry, though he's still a member of the group's board of directors.

"Cuban Jews have a tendency to vote conservative, and in this election, the Republicans have made a huge effort to reach out to Ariel Sharon," the Israeli

prime minister, which could attract Jewish voters, Garcia told JTA. "Some polls show there is slippage to the Republican Party among older Jewish voters."

"For me, Kerry is like Fidel Castro," said Asis, who already has cast a ballot for Bush in early voting. "He lies all the time, manipulating people in order to get their vote. He doesn't believe what he says."

According to a survey conducted in early September by Miami pollster Sergio Bendixen, 72 percent of Cuban-American respondents said they expected to vote for Bush, while 19 percent said they'd support Kerry.

That's down slightly from 2000, when Bush got 82 percent of the community's votes, as opposed to 17 percent for former Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic candidate.

Observers point out that the 10 percent decrease in Cuban-American support for the Republicans would translate into 45,000 fewer votes for the president — which is why, despite its small size, the Cuban Jewish community is nothing for either candidate to sneeze at in a hotly contested state.

Suchlicki says that even if it's a question of a few thousand votes, "anything is significant" in this election. ■

AMERICA
DECIDES
2004

Jesus pulled from anti-Semitism ad campaign in France

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Jesus and Mary have been taken off ads against anti-Semitism in France.

French Jewish students withdrew the images of Jesus and Mary, which were portrayed above the French phrase for "Dirty Jew," from the campaign after they proved too much to bear for Catholics — and many Jews as well.

The Union of Jewish Students had wanted to run the ads in national newspapers and on billboards across France this week but decided to "modify the visuals," a union official told JTA on Monday.

The change followed pressure from major Jewish and anti-racist organizations in France that claimed the campaign would end up doing more harm than good.

One of the most vociferous groups against the campaign was the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, known by its French acronym, LICRA.

In a statement last Friday, LICRA, which is regarded as close to the Jewish community, said the images would "have a counterproductive effect in increasing and exacerbating existing tensions within French society."

The initial advertisements produced for the student campaign showed serene images of Jesus and Mary with the graffiti-style tags, "Dirty Jew" and "Dirty Jewess." Underneath the pictures was

the phrase "Anti-Semitism: Isn't it everyone's concern?"

The images were immediately slammed by Jewish organizations.

Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews, told JTA that the campaign was "badly adapted in using religious symbols that run the risk of hurting the sensibilities of many people."

Cukierman said he told the president of the student group, Yonathan Arfi, that "you're missing the objective and doing more harm than good."

Although official Catholic organizations did not take the lead in condemning the campaign, their reaction, when questioned by the media, largely was negative.

The Rev. Patrick Desbois, who heads the French Catholic Bishops' Committee for Relations with the Jews, said the campaign could be interpreted as "anti-Christian."

"It is as if someone would use a piece of a Torah scroll for a campaign promoting religious freedom. I personally would oppose it," he said.

Pierre d'Ornellas, an auxiliary bishop in Paris, went further, suggesting that France's chief rabbinate should formally distance itself from the ads.

However, both Arfi and the advertising agency claimed the campaign was aimed at a segment of the public that doesn't perpetrate anti-Semitism but isn't committed to fighting it, either. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Clinton: Trust Kerry on Israel

Former President Bill Clinton said U.S. Jews can trust John Kerry to keep Israel safe.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the security of Israel, including its qualitative military superiority, would be unshaken if he were president," Clinton said Tuesday at a packed synagogue in Boca Raton, Fla. "You can rely on it, you can take it to the bank."

Clinton, asked by the Kerry campaign to keep Jewish voters on-side in this crucial swing state a week ahead of the election, earned warm applause.

He said Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate and Massachusetts senator, would be more engaged than Bush in seeking Israeli-Palestinian peace.

"There's also no doubt in my mind that if the newly elected government of Israel finds a partner for peace and decides to go forward, he will be involved in a way that is supportive and in a way that never compromises the defense or the security of Israel," Clinton said.

Bush appoints Jew for Jesus to committee

President Bush promoted an evangelizer of Jews to a presidential commission.

Bush appointed the Rev. Lon Solomon this week to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. Solomon has said his primary reason for founding the huge McClean Bible Church this year is to convert Washington-area Jews.

He also is chairman of the board of the executive committee of Jews for Jesus. Solomon, who was born Jewish and converted as an adult, has pledged to establish a center for disabled children.

Oregon men charged in synagogue desecration

Two Oregon men were indicted for allegedly desecrating a Jewish cemetery in Portland, Ore.

Sean Andrew Sigley and Steven Hale Smith both were charged with hate crimes by the U.S. Justice Department for the incident at the Congregation Shaarie Torah Cemetery in May 2003, when swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti were painted in the Jewish sanctuary there.

If convicted of the crime, each man faces a maximum sentence of 11 years in jail.

UJC acts on gender equity

The United Jewish Communities is launching a professional development program that aims to level the playing field for women.

"In accordance with UJC's commitment to promote gender equity in the federation system, ideally 50 percent" of participants will be women, said Howard Rieger, president and CEO of the coordinating body of the North American Jewish federation system.

Applications now are being accepted for the Executive Development Program, run by the UJC Mandel Center for Leadership Excellence.

The two-year program, which aims to produce 20-25 people to run the top 40 federations, is an updated version of the first Mandel Executive Development Program, which was run from 1995-1997 under the auspices of the Council of Jewish Federations, a UJC precursor. Graduates of that program went on to become top executives of Jewish federations.

The new program comes after the UJC launched a project on promoting gender equity in the federation system.

Coordinated in partnership with Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, the project found deep-seated bias against women in the federation system, noting, for example, that the top executives of the 20 largest federations are all men.

MIDDLE EAST

Arafat on the decline?

Palestinian officials were summoned urgently to Yasser Arafat's side after a deterioration in his health.

The Palestinian Authority president is reported to be having difficulty breathing, and some reports said he had lost consciousness.

A source in Arafat's office told the Jerusalem Post that preparations were underway to transfer Arafat to a Ramallah hospital for urgent surgery.

Palestinian officials said this week that Arafat was recovering from the flu, but other reports said he is suffering from gallstones or stomach cancer.

Previous alerts about Arafat's declining health have proven to be false alarms, however.

Rockets return to Sderot

Two Palestinian rockets landed near an Israeli border town.

The Kassam rockets fired Wednesday by Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip struck an open field outside Sderot, causing no casualties.

But locals complained that a radar system unveiled in the town earlier this month failed to detect the launches and alert residents to go to shelters.

Hamas said the salvo marked the third anniversary of the first Kassam it produced.

The Islamic group has vowed to continue launching rockets, despite the harsh Israeli reprisals they elicit.

WORLD

Solana beams at Gaza vote

The European Union welcomed Knesset approval of Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan.

"I congratulate the Israeli government and the Israeli Parliament on the vote yesterday in the Knesset, which is a historic move which could enhance hopes for the peace Israelis and Palestinians deserve," the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said Wednesday.

But he reiterated E.U. discomfort at the prospect of Israel keeping portions of West Bank land under the Israeli prime minister's plan to quit the Gaza Strip.

"It is a first, but meaningful and important step toward the two-state solution supported by the international community through the 'road map' " peace plan, Solana said.

Ukrainian Jews inaugurate JCC

Jews in a Ukrainian city celebrated the inauguration of a Jewish community center.

The Max Grant Jewish Community Center was inaugurated Monday in Zaporozhye.

The facility was constructed with funds donated by World Jewish Relief, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Federation of Jewish Communities and local donors.

Funding from London's World Jewish Relief was provided through the group's Our Town project, which initiates capital projects to help revitalize Jewish life in reviving communities.

The World Jewish Relief's donation went toward the purchase and reconstruction of a spacious two-story building in the city center.

The building will house a community and welfare center running a variety of cultural, religious and charity programs for Zaporozhye's estimated 20,000 Jews.