

IN THE NEWS

Top Palestinians visit Arafat in France

The Palestinian Authority prime minister and PLO deputy chief went to visit the ailing Yasser Arafat.

The visit by Ahmed Qurei and Mahmoud Abbas, who took over Arafat's responsibilities after he was admitted to a French hospital on Oct. 29, had planned to fly to Paris first thing Monday for what political sources said would be a discussion on whether the comatose Palestinian leader should be taken off life-support.

But they postponed the trip for several hours after Arafat's wife accused them of seeking to kill off Arafat and take over the Palestinian government.

"They are trying to bury Abu Ammar alive," Suha Arafat told Al-Jazeera television, using Arafat's nom de guerre.

NRP quits Israeli coalition

The National Religious Party quit Israel's government coalition, but Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stayed.

NRP representatives decided on the walkout Monday after their two-week ultimatum demanding that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon hold a referendum on his Gaza withdrawal plan expired.

But Netanyahu, a Likud Party member who also had threatened to quit after the Knesset passed the plan, backed down.

Blair to press Bush on Middle East

Tony Blair is expected to push for more U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when he meets President Bush this week.

Aides to the British prime minister told British media that the issue will be at the top of Blair's priority list when he meets with Bush during his visit to the United States on Thursday and Friday.



WORLD REPORT

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Arafat out of the picture, speculation abounds as to who will succeed him

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When the Islamic Prophet Mohammed was dying in 632 A.D., one of his disciples, the future Caliph Omar, raised his sword to strike down anyone who dared to claim that the prophet had breathed his last breath.

According to Islamic tradition, Omar's colleague Abu-Bakr rebuked him.

"If anyone worships Mohammed, Mohammed is dead. If anyone worships God, God is alive, immortal," Abu Bakr said.

If that was the case with Mohammed, many Palestinians argued this week, then it certainly is true of Yasser Arafat, who has been on life-support for the past few days in a Paris hospital as his wife and Palestinian Authority leaders guard information on his condition.

The story about Mohammed has made the rounds in Palestinian areas to justify the transfer of power in the Palestinian Authority even before Arafat was declared dead. The current and former P.A. prime ministers divvied up Arafat's responsibilities when he left for France in late October.

The power shift generally was accepted, but one important Palestinian — the ailing president's wife, Suha — rejected it.

On Sunday, Suha Arafat charged three veteran Palestinian leaders — P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei; Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the PLO's executive committee and a former P.A. prime minister; and Foreign Minister Nabil Sha'ath — of a conspiracy to "bury Abu Ammar while he was still alive."

Abu Ammar is Arafat's nom de guerre.

Suha Arafat made her dramatic statement in an emotional interview with Al-Jazeera,

the Arabic satellite television station, while the three leaders were en route to Paris to look into Arafat's condition.

Suha Arafat, who had not visited the Palestinian areas nor seen her husband since the intifada began more than four years ago, has closely controlled access to her husband in Paris. But the Palestinian leaders going to Paris stressed that as the national leader, Arafat belonged to the entire Palestinian people, not just to his wife.

In Israel, Suha Arafat's unexpected broadside was seen as part of a behind-the-scenes battle for an estimated \$900 million in Arafat's bank accounts, much of it believed to be looted from public P.A. funds. But the impression her outburst may create could further complicate efforts to ensure a smooth transition of power once Arafat is declared dead.

So far, the name of the game has been unity, with everyone from the old guard to the young guard and Fatah to Hamas saying: Let everyone appear united until the "day after," until the present political mist clears.

Under Palestinian law, Rawhi Fattouh, speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, would take Arafat's place as Palestinian Authority president for 60 days, after which new elections would be held.

But Fattouh is little known among Palestinians and has no political base. Therefore it seems increasingly likely that, at least transitionally, the Palestinians will be led by a collective headed by Qurei and Abbas.

Under this arrangement, Qurei would deal with the daily affairs of governing while Abbas handles diplomacy, Palestinian officials said.

From Israel's point of view, that's good

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ANALYSIS

■ Speculating about who will lead the Palestinians after Yasser Arafat

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news: Both of the men have good records of dialogue with Israelis.

Then again, that may prove counterproductive as they work to establish credibility among Palestinians, since it can hurt a leader's popularity to be considered too close to Israel.

Furthermore, both Abbas and Qurei are seen as part of the "Tunis leadership," the coterie of Arafat intimates who lived in exile and never really shared the plight of the local Palestinian population. Arafat ran Palestinian affairs from Tunisia between 1982 and 1994.

In addition, Abbas and Qurei could yet find themselves challenged by other powerful and popular elements in the Palestinian Authority. Among them are former Gaza Strip security chief Mohammed Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub, a West Bank security adviser to Arafat.

Both are "insiders" who spent time in Israeli jails in the 1970s and 1980s and have acquired considerable experience negotiating with Israeli leaders over the past decade. Though they no longer are officially in charge of security organs, they remain politically powerful and may emerge as candidates for the Palestinian leadership.

Another important figure is Marwan Barghouti, leader of the Tanzim, the terrorist wing of Arafat's Fatah faction. Barghouti's popularity is believed to be second only to Arafat's among the Palestinians.

But for now Barghouti's role is limited: He is serving several life sentences in an Israeli jail for involvement in terrorism.

He has been on record as supporting Abbas, but the longer he remains in jail the stronger his image becomes as a sort of Palestinian Nelson Mandela.

For the time being, though, it seems that Qurei and Abbas have emerged as consensus leaders. Qurei rushed to Gaza over the weekend for talks with the various Palestinian factions and terrorist groups. The sad truth from an Israeli point of view is that without the cooperation of Hamas, it's unlikely that any Palestinian government can function with stability.

Under the present state of affairs, stability means implementing the following formula: Give Hamas a piece of the government cake in exchange for a commitment to temporarily hold back anti-Israeli violence.

In what could prove to be a challenge to Qurei, Hamas has said it's looking for a formal role in Palestinian decision making.

"This time is very sensitive. It's a historic time. There is no space for any unilateral decisions," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu-Zuhri said. "Everyone now is calling to form a united Palestinian leadership. This is a demand of our people."

Though everyone talks about unity, neither Qurei nor Hamas has made any commitments. For the time being, Hamas is not integrated into the Palestinian Authority, and continues plotting terrorist attacks.

"The resistance continues and will stop only if the occupation ends," Abu-Zuhri said.

It has become commonplace to say that Arafat did not prepare the stage for his succession, but the situation is more nuanced. Despite ups and downs in relations between Arafat, Qurei and Abbas, in a number of interviews over the past two years Arafat specifically spoke of them as his political heirs.

Though Israel blames Arafat for the collapse of the peace process and the outbreak of the intifada, he left the scene for the two politicians with the richest and most positive records of talks with Israel.

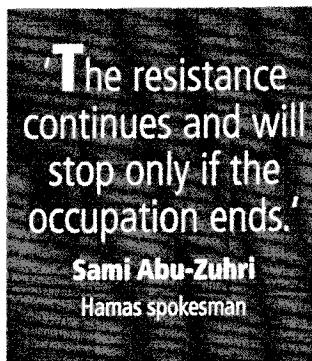
Both are architects of the Oslo Accords. Arafat appointed Abbas as prime minister in April 2003, following heavy pressure from the United States and European Union. It was during Abbas' term as prime minister that Hamas agreed to a hudna, or ceasefire, though it collapsed after three months.

Abbas met openly with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — and in Jerusalem, not at the borders of Gaza or in neutral territory around the globe, as Arafat had done.

For his part, Dahlan, who served as Abbas' defense minister, met regularly with his Israeli counterpart, Shaul Mofaz. Other representatives met with Israeli Justice Minister Yosef "Tommy" Lapid at his office in eastern Jerusalem.

All this ended when Abbas resigned last fall and Qurei took over as prime minister. In the absence of Arafat's blessing, Qurei dared make no overtures to Israel.

Talks may now resume, but these two men still do not enjoy wide support in the territories.



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Prague library features Hebrew texts

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — A rare collection of Hebrew manuscripts and medieval texts is on public view at Prague's National Library.

The Saraval Legacy exhibition displays 34 Hebrew manuscripts that formed the most valuable part of a collection once belonging to Leon Vita Saraval (1771-1851), a Trieste-born Jew and bibliophile.

The collection was purchased in 1853 by the Jewish Theological Seminary in Wroclaw, Poland, which owned some 400 manuscripts and 30,000 books before the

collection was confiscated by the Nazis during World War II.

The Nazis moved much of the Saraval items to Prague to put in their planned museum of an "extinct race."

About one third of the manuscripts were recovered soon after the war, but the rest were lost or scattered around the world.

Gestapo members often looted from Nazi holdings and sold items to the highest bidder.

The National Library has agreed to return the collection to Poland by the end of the year.

House election caps ascent for Florida woman

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Debbie Wasserman Schultz first walked into the Florida House of Representatives as a legislator, she was 26 and most of her colleagues were old enough to be her parents and grandparents.

In January, when she walks into the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, she likely will be in the same boat. But she's excited about it.

"You just have to go into the room knowing you were elected the same way they were," Wasserman Schultz, 38, told JTA. "It's important to prove yourself, that you're an equal."

Two days after being elected to Congress, Wasserman Schultz was sitting in an Orlando hotel room, ready to go to Walt Disney World with her young children, a well-earned vacation after a long year of campaigning.

Amid the screaming of twin 4-year-olds, the congresswoman-elect spoke of her rise in 12 years from a young legislative aide in the Florida House of Representatives to a seat in Congress.

It began with a call from her mentor, Peter Deutsch, then Wasserman Schultz's boss, who was giving up his state house seat to run for Congress.

"It was really amazing," she said. "He called me at home one day in the middle of the legislative session and he said, 'You could run in my race, your house is in my district.'"

The thought may not have crossed her mind before, since she had lived in the district for only three years. But people already had seen her political spark.

"Debbie spoke at a very early age," Larry Wasserman said of his oldest child. "She was always out there and never was the shy, retiring type."

■
Growing up in Long Island, the future lawmaker ran for student council every year, and always lost. She enrolled in the University of Florida as a veterinary medicine major, but the political bug soon hit her and she got involved in student politics.

"She has a gift for politics," said Deutsch, whose seat Wasserman Schultz will fill in

Washington. Deutsch left the House earlier this year to run for Senate, but lost in the Democratic primary.

"She has an understanding of the political dynamics but also has a passion for being a really strong advocate and shaping policy," he said.

Wasserman Schultz changed her major to political science and graduated in 1988. She started working for Deutsch, eventually becoming his chief of staff, while commuting to Gainesville to get her masters degree in political campaigning.

■
After Deutsch suggested that Wasserman Schultz follow in his footsteps in 1992, the newlywed worked with her husband to figure out if they could afford a run for the state house. She then started an aggressive campaign, going door to door through southern Florida's retirement condominium communities.

"I tried to make up in shoe leather what I didn't have in money," she said.

She made an impression on the voters.

"It helped, frankly, that the district she won in has a large Jewish population," Larry Wasserman said. "A lot of the elderly Jewish people who live in her district treat her like she's their granddaughter."

Wasserman Schultz won 53 percent of the vote in a six-way Democratic primary that year, avoiding a runoff, and became the youngest woman to sit in the House. She served for eight years, before leaving office due to term limits, and joined the State Senate in 2000.

This year, Wasserman Schultz's campaign focused on homeland security, health care, funding federal education programs and shrinking the nation's deficit. She won 70 percent of the vote to defeat Margaret Hostetter.

Her father said Wasserman Schultz has not been particularly active in the Jewish community, but has forged ties with Jewish groups as a lawmaker. She helped to form the National Jewish Democratic Council and served on the regional board of the American Jewish Congress.

She also forged ties with other Jewish lawmakers, such as Pennsylvania state Sen. Allyson Schwartz, who will join



Office of Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.)

Wasserman Schultz as a new Democratic congresswoman next year. The two talked by phone last week to congratulate each other and share advice on the transition to Congress.

Wasserman Schultz is seen as a rising star among Democrats. Though she didn't face a primary opponent and was seen as a shoo-in to be elected, prominent Democrats like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) campaigned on her behalf, and she raised more than \$1.3 million.

Those she leaves behind in Florida say she has shown an ability to compromise with Republicans, while fighting hard for her issues.

But Wasserman Schultz also is seen as a liberal coming to Washington at a time that it is becoming more conducive to conservatives. Wasserman Schultz is an adamant supporter of gay and abortion rights, and sponsored bills in the Florida legislature calling for equal gender representation on state boards and price parity for men's and women's clothing at dry cleaners.

She expects her new job to be hard, specifically the commute between Florida and Washington and leaving her three children behind with her husband.

But she has become accustomed to balancing her job and career. After all, this is a woman who used a crayon to jot down notes during one congressional campaign debate — but then, crayons are a usually present in the purse of a mother of three small children. ■

Wasserman
Schultz 'has a gift
for politics.'
Rep Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.)

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Poll: French see Arafat as hero

French people regard Yasser Arafat as a hero rather than a terrorist, according to a new poll.

Asked to choose whether the Palestinian Authority president is a "hero of national resistance" or a terrorist, 43 percent chose the former and 27 percent the latter. Ten percent said Arafat fitted into both categories, while 9 percent said he was neither one nor the other.

The poll, published Monday and commissioned jointly by the Liberation newspaper and a national public radio station, also found that three times as many French hold Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon responsible for Middle East violence than Arafat.

In addition, 34 percent said they had more sympathy for the Palestinians, as opposed to 13 percent for Israel.

A similar poll in 2000 found almost equal degrees of sympathy for both sides.

BBC correspondent cries over Arafat

The BBC received at least 500 complaints after its broadcaster said she "started to cry" when an ill Yasser Arafat left for a Paris hospital.

Barbara Plett, BBC's Middle East correspondent, reported Oct. 30 on a BBC radio program her impressions of the Palestinian Authority president's departure.

"When the helicopter carrying the frail old man rose above his ruined compound, I started to cry," she said. BBC sources were quoted as saying that Plett realized her words were a misjudgment.

Jewish groups long have accused the BBC of pro-Palestinian bias.

Filmmaker's killing prompts anti-Muslim outbreak

The killing of a Dutch filmmaker, allegedly by an Islamic extremist, sparked anti-Muslim incidents in the Netherlands.

Since the Nov. 2 murder of Theo van Gogh, who earlier this year released a film critical of how women are treated under Islam, there have been numerous anti-Muslim incidents, including two attempts to burn down mosques, Dutch media reported Sunday.

Eight alleged Islamic extremists have been arrested in connection with the murder. Among those arrested was the alleged 26-year-old killer, identified only as Mohammed B. Mainstream Muslim groups have condemned the killing.

Argentine rabbi harassed?

An Argentine rabbi reportedly was insulted during a lecture last week. The Nov. 3 incident involving Rabbi Daniel Dolynski occurred at the National University of Entre Rios Province. Dolynski was participating in a lecture about reproductive health when a student shouted at him and others performed the Nazi salute. The DAIA Jewish umbrella group denounced the act.

AMIA case appeal

An Argentine Jewish group is appealing the acquittal of five defendants in the bombing of an Argentine Jewish center.

Five locals were acquitted in September of involvement in the July 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish center in Buenos Aires.

Eighty-five people were killed and some 300 wounded in the still-unsolved bombing.

JNF attacked in Scotland

A Scottish pro-Palestinian group petitioned the country's Parliament to strip the Jewish National Fund of its charitable status.

The Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign gathered some 2,200 signatories to support their claims that JNF policies exclude non-Jews and contribute to human rights abuses.

The campaign's Ivan Clark told lawmakers: "The objection to the JNF is that it is an active part of the system that denies Palestinians their fundamental human rights with respect to land."

The focus has moved to Scotland after the Charity Commission for England and Wales decided in June that the JNF satisfied its guidelines.

Man sentenced for defacing Jewish memorial

A man received a two-year prison sentence for defacing a French Jewish war memorial. A Paris court on Monday found Mathieu M., 22, guilty of scrawling swastikas and Nazi graffiti at the memorial at Verdun, site of a major World War I battle, in May.

Half of his sentence was suspended by the court.

MIDDLE EAST

U.S. wants alleged crime boss extradited

An alleged Israeli underworld boss faces extradition to the United States on drug charges.

Israeli police arrested Zev Rosenstein on Monday following a joint investigation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

Rosenstein is suspected of involvement in a Miami drug ring, and could face trial in the United States.

Under Israeli extradition laws, he would have to be returned to the Jewish state to serve his sentence. Rosenstein, considered one of Israel's major crime bosses, denied any wrongdoing.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. city to debate divestment

The City Council of Somerville, Mass. will consider a resolution asking investors to drop their holdings in Israel.

According to the resolution, Israel has violated human rights in its occupation of land seized in the 1967 Six-Day War, including detaining individuals without charge and blocking ambulances.

The resolution "urges all investors in the city to divest from companies involved with Israel's human rights violations and from Israel Bonds." It specifically recommends divestment from several companies, including Caterpillar, Boeing and Northrup Grumman Corporation.

The Boston Jewish Community Relations Council has been working with Somerville residents and has coordinated statements to be read at the meeting Monday against the resolution by city residents, faith leaders and Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone, said Nancy Kaufman, the community relations council's executive director.

Cornell honors Leo Frank

Cornell University is honoring Leo Frank, the Jewish victim of a Southern lynch mob.

The school in upstate New York, Frank's alma mater, is holding a weeklong series of events honoring Frank, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Frank was arrested in Atlanta in 1913, accused of the death of a 13-year-old girl. Frank was convicted of the crime in a rigged trial tinged with anti-Semitism.

Georgia's governor later commuted his sentence to life imprisonment, but a mob lynched him in 1915.

Frank's death led to the founding of the Anti-Defamation League.

Reconstructionist founder dies

Benjamin Mehlman, a founder and former president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, died Oct. 31 in New York at the age of 94.

Mehlman was a former president of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, in Manhattan, which was the first Reconstructionist synagogue.