

IN THE NEWS

Mahmoud Abbas praises Ariel Sharon

Mahmoud Abbas praised Ariel Sharon as a partner for peace.

In his first foreign media interview since taking office, the Palestinian Authority president told The New York Times that the Israeli prime minister's plan to withdraw Israeli soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip this summer was a "good sign to start with" that could herald a new era of peace.

While pledging to hold Islamic terrorist groups to the truce he declared with Sharon at last week's peace summit in Egypt, Abbas declined to express regret for the launch of Palestinian violence in September 2000.

Assassination resounds in Israel

The assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri was a result of Beirut's failure to rein in terrorism, Israeli officials said.

"He lived in a dangerous country and they should have gotten control over that country," Israel's deputy prime minister, Shimon Peres, told Reuters after Hariri was killed in a Beirut car bombing Monday.

Instead, Peres said, the Lebanese government "surrendered to all kinds of terrorists."

Jewish rescue remembered

A joint Filipino-American effort that saved 1,200 Jews on the eve of World War II was remembered.

Sunday's event in Cincinnati commemorated the efforts of the Frieder brothers, Cincinnati businessmen who owned a cigar factory in the Philippines, and the country's president at the time, Manuel Quezon.

With the help of American and Jewish officials, the brothers brought German and Austrian Jews to the Philippines

WORLD REPORT

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After the summit, steps forward are tempered by doubts and fears

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The dust is still settling after last week's summit at the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheik, but early signs on the ground are highly contradictory.

Last week, just 48 hours after the summit, Palestinian terrorist groups fired more than 50 mortar shells at Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. But now Hamas, the largest and most important of the terrorist groups, says it's committed to the cease-fire announced at the summit.

Israel's security service, Shin Bet, says the cease-fire won't last, but the Israel Defense Forces say everything must be done to give Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas a chance to impose law and order.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is doing all he can to help Abbas, but right-wing efforts to subvert Sharon's policy are taking on a more menacing character.

And while Israeli officials say peacemaking will succeed only if the terrorist groups are disarmed — a key component of the internationally backed "road map" peace plan — Abbas makes clear that he has no intention of moving against the terrorists any time soon.

Not surprisingly, assessments differ as to whether this latest Israeli-Palestinian peace bid will succeed.

Sharon is accentuating the positive. He returned from the summit in high spirits, emphasizing two major achievements: All the key players, including Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Abdullah and Abbas, now recognize that terrorism must stop before peacemaking can begin. They also

all accept Israel's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank as the basis for a new dynamic leading to peace talks based on the road map.

In the not-so-distant past, the Arabs and many Europeans had argued that peacemaking was the way to stop terrorism. Now, a senior Sharon aide told JTA, it's clear to everyone that terrorism must stop before peace can have a chance.

On the declarative level at least, the summit signaled a return to the situation that existed before the intifada began in September 2000. According to the understandings reached, the violence will end, Israeli troops will move out of Palestinian towns and cities, roadblocks will be lifted, Palestinian prisoners will be released and Palestinian workers will return to Israel.

But Israeli officials point to key differences from the pre-intifada status quo that give them hope for a better outcome this time around.

For one, both sides have been traumatized by the violence and realize the consequences of failing to achieve a political settlement. Moreover, influential regional players are playing a positive role, and an Israeli withdrawal plan and a step-by-step road map toward an agreement are in place.

But the biggest change of all, one official told JTA, "is that now, at last, there is a rational partner on the Palestinian side."

The acid test, Israeli officials say, will be whether the new Palestinian leadership can stop the terror. Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner maintains that this will be possible only if Abbas confronts and disarms Hamas

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and Islamic Jihad.

"Otherwise, even if he gets them to agree to a cease-fire, it won't last. In a few days or weeks from now they will start firing mortars or Kassam rockets again, we will react, and we'll all be back to Square One, embroiled in a new intifada," Pazner said. "The militias will either have to disarm voluntarily, or Abbas will have to take them on. There is no other way."

The fragility of the cease-fire was highlighted when terrorist groups bombarded Jewish settlements in Gaza on Feb. 10. But on Sunday, after a meeting with Abbas, Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar announced that Hamas not only accepted the cease-fire, but would consult with the Palestinian Authority before "retaliating against Israeli violations."

Abbas showed his seriousness after the shelling by firing high-ranking P.A. security commanders for failing to enforce the cease-fire.

Israeli officials also are concerned about the presence of Iranian-backed Hezbollah cells in the Palestinian territories and fear they might act on orders from Tehran to undermine steps toward peace. They fear Abbas himself could be a target.

The IDF and Shin Bet differ in their assessments of how much Abbas can achieve. Shin Bet is convinced he will not act against the terrorists and that the current lull will last a month or two at most, and the terrorist groups will use that time to rearm and prepare for new attacks.

Israel therefore should be careful not to take steps that will make fighting terror-

ism harder in the future, Shin Bet says.

The army, on the other hand, argues that Abbas must be given every chance to impose law and order and that Israel must do all it can to help him, even if that means taking chances on security.

Sharon, who backs the IDF's approach rather than Shin Bet's, says the government will do all it can to help Abbas. Indeed, it seems Sharon is ready to break with precedent and release terrorists who have killed Israelis, a key Palestinian demand.

Two initial groups of 500 and 400 prisoners slated for release do not include any with "blood on their hands." But the day after his return from Sharm el-Sheik last week, Sharon told journalists he had promised Abbas that if he ended terrorism, Israel would consider releasing prisoners who have attacked Israelis. Sharon also will allow terrorists expelled from the territories to return.

Like Abbas, Sharon faces strong domestic opposition. Hawks in his own Likud Party are stepping up their calls for a refer-

endum on disengagement, and extremists on the far right have been heckling Cabinet ministers in public places and sending them threatening letters.

Sharon, who security officials fear could be a target, says he is determined to press ahead without a time-consuming referendum and is urging security forces to deal with extremists making physical threats.

Whether or not Palestinian terrorism ends and despite the threats from Jewish extremists, Sharon

aides say the prime minister will go ahead with the disengagement plan. But what happens next will depend on the Palestinians.

If the Palestinians fail to fight terrorism, Israel will stop after the withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank and "park" on the new lines "for as long as it takes," a close Sharon aide told JTA. But, he said, if there is concerted Palestinian action against terrorism, the parties will be able to move relatively quickly toward the establishment of a Palestinian state.

"Everything depends on how they control terror," the aide said. ■

'The militias will either have to disarm voluntarily, or Abbas will have to take them on. There is no other way.'

Avi Pazner

Israeli government spokesman

German politicians squabble

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — Germany's Jewish leader is calling on politicians to band together to tackle right-wing extremism instead of bickering over its causes.

Paul Spiegel spoke out this week after Edmund Stoiber, head of Bavaria's Christian Social Union, blamed the economic policies of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and his Social Democratic Party for increasing right-wing extremism.

The German public recently was shocked when legislators from the far-right National Democratic Party walked out of a Holocaust remembrance ceremony in Saxony, suggesting that German suffering in the war had been given short shrift.

But many observers suggest Stoiber's statements are politically driven and could even help the NPD indirectly.

Stoiber, who lost to Schroeder in the 2002 national election, told the Welt am Sonntag newspaper Sunday that Germany's poor economy today is similar to that during the Weimar Republic, which historians say paved the way for the Nazi rise to power. Joblessness is particularly high in the eastern states.

Stoiber's party and its sister party, the Christian Democratic Union, have come under fire in the past for failing to distance themselves from certain far-right sentiments that overlap with mainstream conservatism, such as negative views of immigrants and rejection of a national Holocaust memorial.

In 2003, legislator Martin Hohmann was ejected from the Christian Democratic Union's Parliamentary faction over a speech in which he said Jews could be called a "nation of perpetrators" for their supposed role in the Bolshevik revolution. ■

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British Jews confront growing anti-Semitism

By DANIELLA PELED

LONDON (JTA) — It may sometimes seem that British Jews display upper lips as stiff as their non-Jewish countrymen's, preferring to suffer quietly or downplay prejudice directed against them.

But new official statistics have revealed that anti-Semitic incidents in Britain have reached new heights.

According to the Community Security Trust, the body that monitors threats to British Jewry, a total of 532 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded last year, marking a 42 percent increase from 2003.

The figures include a 323 percent rise in anti-Semitic threats, with an all-time high of 93 such incidents last year, compared with 22 in 2003. There also was a 54 percent increase in assaults, with 83 attacks recorded last year, including four in which the victim's life was endangered.

"Violent assaults increased disproportionately," said the trust's director of communications, Michael Whine. "This increase is extremely alarming. The transfer of tensions in the Middle East to the streets of Britain has resulted in an unprecedented level of anti-Semitic incidents."

"Jews now have two fronts, which wasn't the case five years ago," said Barry Kosmin of the U.K.'s Institute for Jewish Policy Research. "There is a constant level that comes from the far right, but there's the opening of a new front by far-left and Palestinian sympathizers and people antagonistic to the Zionist cause."

"The government shares the Jewish community's concerns about attacks on Jewish people and property," said a Home Office spokesperson. "Attacks on synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are completely unacceptable and we continue to strongly condemn, anti-Semitism and all forms of racism."

But community leaders are keen to emphasize that this new atmosphere goes far beyond street thuggery. They charge that widespread media hostility toward Israel, which many feel often crosses the line from acceptable criticism into downright bias, has served to legitimize prejudice against Jews.

One such incident was the publication of a cartoon in the staunchly pro-Palestinian

newspaper *The Independent* on Jan. 27, 2003 — Holocaust Memorial Day — that

showed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon biting off the head of a Palestinian child.

Not only were official complaints by Jewish groups dismissed, but the drawing went on to win the Cartoon of the Year award from Britain's Political Cartoon Society.

As for the BBC, whose policy is to describe Palestinian terrorists as "militants,"

the corporation's stance so angered the Israeli government that by mid-2003 Israeli officials temporarily severed all official contact with the broadcaster.

Analysts say that in some cases the demonization of Israel has amounted to incitement.

Pointing to the "insidious and drip-drip effect" of coverage of the Middle East conflict, Kosmin said, "The left-liberal media claim they distinguish between being anti-Israel and anti-Semitic, and at an academic level you can make that distinction, but people are attacking the local synagogue, not searching out their local Zionist headquarters."

The issue has spilled over into university circles, with calls for British scholars to boycott their Israeli counterparts.

Community leaders are even more worried as they point to a creeping level of prejudice in British politics.

In recent months Jewish leaders have expressed concern that elements in Britain's ruling Labor Party have been attempting to make political capital over issues of anti-Jewish prejudice.

In May 2003, Britain's longest-serving member of Parliament, Labor's Tam Dalyell, sparked controversy when

he expressed concern over a "cabal" of Jewish advisers allegedly exerting undue influence over Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Then, in a piece published in the *Muslim Weekly* newspaper this January, Minister Mike O'Brien of the Department of Trade and Industry said that only Labor would protect the rights of Muslims and campaign for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Singling out the leader

of the Conservative party, who is Jewish, O'Brien wrote, "Ask yourself what will Michael Howard do for British Muslims? Will his foreign policy aim to help Palestine?"

Weeks later, Jewish leaders were astonished when trial posters for the Labor election campaign featured the faces of Howard and his shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin — Britain's two most prominent Jewish politicians — transposed onto the bodies of pigs. Another image showed Howard as a Fagin-type hypnotist.

"There is at the moment a very nasty smell of anti-Semitism around," said Labor peer Lord Greville Janner, who is Jewish. "Each of these issues or items on its own is not particularly important, but I can't remember a time since the end of the war when there has been so much of this muck around."

With mainstream ignorance high, British Jews face a battle if anti-Semitism is to be treated as a general human-rights issue, rather than a Jewish problem that Jews are responsible for tackling.

"The single most important thing is for our community to enlist others to join in the protest against the attacks," said Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks. "Jews must not be left to fight anti-Semitism alone."

'The left-liberal media claim they distinguish between being anti-Israel and anti-Semitic, and at an academic level you can make that distinction, but people are attacking the local synagogue, not searching out their local Zionist headquarters.'

Barry Kosmin

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Travel advisory challenged

Jews and Christians asked President Bush to cancel a U.S. advisory against travel to Israel.

Monday's petition to the White House was signed by Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and evangelical Christian officials.

It calls for the State Department travel warning that encourages Americans to "defer travel" to Israel to be rescinded in response to the improved security situation.

The advisory has been in place since the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in the fall of 2000.

Convicted rabbi gets one count dropped

A court dismissed one of the counts against a U.S. rabbi who had been convicted of molesting two teenage girls at a New Jersey yeshiva.

On Feb. 10, an appeals court in New Jersey threw out one of the charges against Baruch Lanner for endangering the welfare of a child between 1992 and 1996, while he was the principal of a New Jersey yeshiva.

Despite the ruling, Lanner still faces sentencing Feb. 23 for his conviction for endangering the welfare of another girl and for one count each of aggravated criminal sexual conduct and criminal sexual conduct.

The case rocked the modern Orthodox world because Lanner was a longtime leader of the National Council of Synagogue Youth, an Orthodox youth group.

No hope for the lovelorn?

The most popular Jewish singles site on the Internet was down most of Valentine's Day. Visitors to JDate received a message saying the site was down and apologizing for the inconvenience.

MIDDLE EAST

Stabber shot dead

Israeli troops killed a knife-wielding Palestinian in the West Bank.

The youth was shot Monday as he tried to stab soldiers near Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs. He succumbed to his wounds despite Israeli medics' efforts to save him.

In another incident disrupting internal truce efforts by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, a mortar struck an Israeli military position at the Morag settlement in the Gaza Strip.

Terror victims file petition

A group representing Israeli victims of terrorism petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to block the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The petition, filed Monday, argues that the decision to pardon the prisoners can be made only by President Moshe Katsav.

Israel said over the weekend that it would release 500 Palestinian prisoners this week as part of a series of goodwill gestures aimed at building trust with the Palestinians.

Israelis protest withdrawal plan

An estimated 15,000 Israelis demonstrated in the Gaza Strip against Israel's withdrawal plan.

Monday's rally in Gush Katif featured many protesters wearing orange shorts and orange bandanas and carrying orange backpacks, the Jerusalem Post reported. The settlers have chosen orange as their color as they protest the withdrawal, slated for this summer.

Three-month disengagement

Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan will take 12 weeks to implement, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said.

Briefing the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on

Monday, Sharon also said he would seek Cabinet approval next Sunday for the plan to evacuate the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements this summer.

Terrorists sentenced to life in prison

Three Palestinians were sentenced to life in prison for their roles in terrorist attacks.

An Israeli military court sentenced two members of Hamas for participating in a March 2003 suicide bus attack in Haifa that killed 17 people.

A member of Islamic Jihad was sentenced for his role in a shooting attack that killed 12 people in Hebron in November 2002.

Tough times, tough measures

Israel's president called for placing dangerous settlers under administrative detention.

"Sometimes in order to safeguard democracy, we have to use undemocratic means such as administrative detention," The Jerusalem Post quoted Moshe Katsav as saying Monday after several Israeli officials received death threats attributed to right-wing extremists opposed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

Traditionally used against Arab terrorists, administrative detention allows Israeli authorities to lock up suspects for a period without access to lawyers or relatives.

Cough, cough

Israel's smoking rate dropped to its lowest point ever, according to a new survey. Only 23 percent of Israeli adults smoke, compared with 42 percent in the 1970s, 37 percent in the early 1980s and 29 percent in the 1990s, the Jerusalem Post reported.

The smoking rate in Israel is slightly higher than in the United States, but lower than in Europe.

Bodies back for burial in Gaza

Israel returned the bodies of 15 slain Palestinian terrorists to their families.

Monday's handover at the Erez crossing into the Gaza Strip was part of a package of Israeli goodwill gestures aimed at bolstering Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' bid to secure a truce with Islamic terrorist groups.

Israeli forces generally allow Palestinian medics to collect the bodies of terrorists who die carrying out attacks in Gaza and the West Bank, but those killed in Israel proper often are buried in temporary graves by the military.

WORLD

Dresden bombing remembered

Neo-Nazis marched in Dresden, Germany, on the 60th anniversary of the commemoration of the Allied bombing of the city.

The estimated 5,000 marchers took part in one of the largest far-right marches in Germany since the end of World War II.

Later, tens of thousands of residents gathered in the middle of the city to light candles honoring the victims of all wars.

"We want to make clear that we in Dresden are for democracy and remembrance and don't want this event to be disturbed by others," said Saxony's state premier, Georg Milbradt.

London mayor: No 'sorry' forthcoming

London's mayor refused to apologize for comparing a Jewish reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard. Politicians and Jewish groups had asked Ken Livingstone to apologize for comments last week to Oliver Finagold of the London Evening Standard.

In refusing, Livingstone said he had been subjected to a 24-year hate campaign by the Standard and its sister paper, the Daily Mail.