

IN THE NEWS

Ariel Sharon assails Abbas

Inaction by Mahmoud Abbas against Palestinian terror groups effectively has bolstered them, Ariel Sharon said.

"Instead of dismantling the terrorist groups, Abu Mazen is boosting them through his actions," the Israeli prime minister told visiting Sens. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) on Monday.

But in a sign of tougher tactics on the ground, P.A. police exchanged fire with a Hamas crew that apparently intended to launch rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel on Monday.

Annan talks to Jewish officials

Kofi Annan said the United Nations, Israel and world Jewry "have reached a new level of confidence and mutual understanding."

But the U.N. secretary-general, speaking to international Jewish officials at the United Nations on Monday, admitted that "there is still some distance to travel."

Jewish officials attending the meeting said they were impressed by Annan's sincerity, but are skeptical about the United Nations becoming a more hospitable place for Israel.

New chair for conference

Harold Tanner was elected chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The past president of the American Jewish Committee was unanimously confirmed Tuesday afternoon at a meeting of the umbrella organization for 52 U.S. Jewish groups.

Since the nominating committee announced its choice of Tanner on April 7, the heads of the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League questioned the nominating process, suggesting Tanner was a last-minute candidate who had not been vetted properly.

Tanner will assume his duties on May 1.

WORLD REPORT

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60 years after war's end, Berlin remembers Europe's murdered Jews

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — A long-disputed national Holocaust memorial that is set to open in Berlin will be Germany's first monument dedicated to all the Jews murdered across Nazi-occupied Europe.

On May 12, a few days after ceremonies marking 60 years since the end of World War II in Europe, the public will be able to enter the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a sea of 2,700 cement steles in the heart of Berlin.

Visitors also may descend into an information center, where the history of the Holocaust is told with photos, documents and names.

They can learn about Meyer Spektor of Odessa, shot to death by a Nazi mobile killing squad in 1942, when he was 64. Or Olga from Litomysl in the former Czechoslovakia, murdered at 46 in Auschwitz. Or Rachel Posinova of Hamburg, asphyxiated in the gas chambers of Auschwitz with her daughter in 1944.

In all, 800 names — of infants, adults, the elderly — will represent the 6 million murdered Jews.

"The main task of the memorial is to keep alive the discussion about German history," says Dagmar von Wilcken, 46, the exhibition designer whose concept for the underground center complements the aboveground sculptural memorial designed by American architect Peter Eisenman.

"What I like about the memorial is that it is not a thing that says we have apologized and now it is over," von Wilcken says. "Rather, people will like it and dislike it and discuss

it. And maybe we can even expect that right-wing people will spray-paint graffiti on it. It is a place where all the different thoughts in Germany exist at the same time."

Paired like the conscious and subconscious mind, the memorial's two elements represent the landscape of Germany's so-called culture of remembrance, marked by 60 years of confronting the legacy of National Socialism.

In 1945, many Germans were relieved to blame a few perpetrators. Today it is widely understood that Nazi crimes against humanity were committed with the help, approval and acceptance of a majority of Germans.

By now, the period has been memorialized in hundreds of monuments, in museums at former concentration camps and in books about local history.

But there still is resistance to establishing a huge memorial in Germany's reclaimed capital. There are questions of cost — which runs to the tens of millions of dollars — and of purpose.

For more than a decade, many Germans have expressed annoyance with the constant reminders of their history. That's one reason why TV personality Lea Rosh, who is not Jewish, fought for 10 years to have an unavoidable reminder of the Holocaust placed in the nation's capital.

The German Parliament gave its approval in 1999. But the question remains: For whom is this memorial? The historians and artists working on it say it is for them, and for all Germans.

Until now, "There had been no place in

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YOM
HASHOAH
FEATURE

■ Memorial to Europe's murdered Jews opens in Berlin

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Germany that was dedicated to all the murdered Jews of Europe," says historian Ulrich Baumann, who for three years assembled family histories for the information center. "It is a subject that is nearly unbearable."

He often asks himself, "What would I have done if I lived in the ghetto?" How would he have felt "going to the gas chamber?"

"The murder plan was so brutal, and you can't really imagine it," he says. It's also difficult to imagine how Germans "coming from more or less normal families went to Poland and became murderers. These are some of the questions that we faced every day" on the project.

"It's sometimes very difficult to fight against the tears," says historian Jurgen Lillteicher, who since 2002 has worked on the presentation of 800 biographies from the archive of Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

Together with the Topography of Terror archive and memorial in Berlin, Lillteicher is responsible for a database on Holocaust memorials across Europe.

"A lot of grief was accumulated" in his years of work on the project, says Lillteicher, 36. "Sometimes you even have survivors coming here and telling their stories. A link develops between the historian and the survivor and the families, which is rather unusual."

Though German Jews are on the board of the memorial foundation, Lillteicher says that this is "a project of German

non-Jews to show the world, and also the people here, that even when the survivors die, what happened is represented in the heart of the city and should never be forgotten."

One of the youngest staff members, museum-education expert Stefanie Fischer, 27, helped set the tone for the underground exhibit.

"We had a lot of discussions on just how much violence we would depict, and on how to protect the dignity of the victims," she says.

The theme of the Holocaust has "somehow always accompanied my life," says Fischer, whose undergraduate project focused on former West German exhibitions on the Holocaust. "As a result of the Cold War, most museums in [West] Germany focused on the fate of German Jews, and that's a very small minority among Holocaust victims. So I think we are going to close a gap in the presentation of the Holocaust in Germany."

"Many Germans are tired of talking or hearing about the Holocaust," she adds. "They think they have already heard so much about it, they hear it every day. But if you listen very closely to what they know, they know nothing. And this tells me that there is still a lot you can teach people."

The Holocaust haunts exhibition designer von Wilcken. Though her parents

were children during the Nazi era, her uncle was one of many Germans forced by Russian troops to look at dead victims at Buchenwald when the camp was liberated.

"My mother was not allowed because she was a young girl," von Wilcken says. "But her brother would not eat for a week afterward."

Such scenes were repeated across Germany by virtually all liberating forces.

Von Wilcken first met Holocaust survivors years ago, when she was working on a kibbutz in Israel. Meeting people "with numbers on their arms" shook her deeply.

She knew she "could not change history," she says. "But I felt some kind of responsibility."

Designing the information center has given her the sense of doing "something against forgetting."

She tried to make the four-room exhibition space correspond to Eisenman's memorial, bringing the rectangular shapes of his steles down "through the ceiling."

Visitors can "look into the pillars" to see photos, documents and personal statements. It gives the victims "a voice, a face," she says.

Dealing with the subject every day for four years does not remove the shock, she adds.

"It hits me every time like the first time, sometimes even worse," she says. "It's still not understandable."

The main task of the memorial is to keep alive the discussion about German history.

Dagmar von Wilcken
Exhibition designer

U.S. launches deportation against war criminal

NEW YORK (JTA) — Deportation proceedings were launched in the United States against a man found to have participated in World War II-era crimes.

Last year, a U.S. appeals court upheld a decision against Jack Reimer, who trained as a camp guard at Trawniki, Poland, and was involved in the extermination of Jews throughout Poland.

Reimer, 86, who has lived in New York, previously was found to have lied about his wartime activities when he applied to enter the United States in 1951.

The U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations and the Department of Homeland Security jointly launched the deportation proceedings against him.

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U.S. reports give Israel higher marks

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The State Department has substantially changed how it reports two areas of acute concern to U.S. Jews: terrorism and Israel's human rights record.

Israel got much higher marks in the 2004 human-rights country report, published in February, than it did in 2003 — not because of any significant changes on the ground but apparently because of a shift in how the Bush administration views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With terrorism, the department is passing responsibility for statistics to the newly created National Counterterrorism Center, which is broadly expanding how a terrorist act is defined. Hate crimes abroad soon will be counted as terrorist attacks, which could redefine how anti-Semitic attacks are treated as well.

Both changes could have far-reaching implications for how Israel and its enemies are perceived in the United States and around the world, because international media and Congress often cite State Department reports as authoritative.

In the "occupied territories" annex to its 2004 country report for Israel, the State Department removes the traditional "holding sentence" — the department's term for the sentence that reflects its overall assessment of a country's human rights record. Essentially, the department is reserving judgment about Israel's human-rights record.

The holding sentence for the 2003 report was, "Israel's overall human rights record in the occupied territories remained poor and worsened in the treatment of foreign human rights activists as it continued to commit numerous, serious human rights abuses."

That statement disappears in the 2004 report. The closest statement to any overall assessment is, "There were reports that Israeli security forces used excessive force, abused and tortured detainees."

Attributing such abuses to "reports" suggests that the State Department is pulling back from a long record of criticizing Israel's practices in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

By contrast, the Palestinian Authority earns exactly the same holding sentence in both the 2003 and 2004 reports: "The P.A.'s overall human rights record remained

poor, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses."

State Department explanations suggest the change came because of a shift in how the Bush administration perceives the conflict. The United States appears readier to accept long-standing Israeli claims that the blurred distinction between Palestinian combatants and civilians often makes it hard to assign blame in incidents that end with Palestinian deaths.

"I mean, there were over 800 Palestinians that were killed in the year. And, you know, when you look at those cases, how many of them were fighters, how many of them were civilians that were in an area where the fighters were and they got hit by mistake, and how many of them might have been deliberate?" Michael Kozak, the assistant secretary of state, said in a recent briefing on the report. "It's very hard to sort those all out. So what we've tried to do is just try to report the incidents as factually as possible and then the reader can draw his own conclusion."

Another State Department spokesman said an effort to keep reports concise was another reason that many allegations of Israeli human-rights abuses disappeared between the 2003 and 2004 reports.

The 2003 report cited at length allegations that Israeli troops had confiscated, destroyed or looted Palestinian property. Though human-rights groups say land confiscation continued unabated, the 2004 report played down such reports and attributed them to others.

Other areas of improvement in the human-rights reports had to do with how Israel treats religious minorities in Israel proper, and how it treats Palestinian prisoners.

In 2003, the summary sentence on religious freedom said Israel "generally respected" freedom of religion, but with "some restrictions," many of them having to do with the difficulties of Conservative and Reform Jews in Israel.

The 2004 report noted the same difficulties, but dropped the phrase "some restrictions" in the summary sentence.

Both reports say Israel's prison system "generally met international standards." The subtle difference between 2003 and 2004 is that the latest report includes within that assessment holding centers for Palestinian detainees, while the 2003 report grades such camps as "generally poorer" than conventional Israeli prisons.

The response in the Jewish community has been muted. Israeli diplomats and pro-Israel activists are pleased about the latest human-rights report but have not called attention to the changes.

Even pro-Arab and human rights groups have been slow to note the change. Some say that's because they long ago lost confidence in U.S. objectivity when it comes to Israel and other close allies.

"Regimes that are allies are treated with greater deference," said Michael Rosenbluth, the Amnesty International-USA country coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Others saw an erosion of standards.

Edward Abington, a Washington lobbyist for the Palestinian Authority who helped draft the reports in the mid-1990s when he was U.S. consul general in Jerusalem, said that State Department used to go out of its way to publish an objective report.

This year, by contrast, "It was almost as if the occupied territories section became a section detailing Palestinian Authority abuses without reference to the fact that the West Bank was occupied by Israel," he said.

The change in how the government counts terrorist statistics has implications not just for Israel, but for Jewish communities abroad.

The methodology developed in the 1980s was designed to target the state-sponsored terrorism common at the time, said John Brennan, the center's interim director. But that methodology is inadequate in today's reality, with "transnational" terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida.

"Political violence, such as hate crimes, were not counted," Brennan said — but now they will be. That could extend to hate crimes that target a country's Jewish minority.

New definitions lead to changes in how Israel's human-rights record is ranked.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Laura Bush to speak at Holocaust memorial

Laura Bush will join lawmakers in remembering Holocaust victims. The first lady will be the keynote speaker at the U.S. Capitol's annual Holocaust Days of Remembrance observance Thursday.

Bush will join Susan Eisenhower, granddaughter of the late President Eisenhower; Israel's ambassador to the United States, Daniel Ayalon; and Fred Zeidman and Ruth Mandel, chairman and vice chairwoman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

Group lobbies Congress for Palestinian aid

Top leaders of the Israel Policy Forum will lobby Congress for aid to the Palestinians.

A group of about a dozen senior IPF activists, led by the group's president, Seymour Reich, will be on Capitol Hill on Wednesday to lobby congressmen to back President Bush's initiatives, such as fast-track aid to the Palestinians, before Israel's Gaza withdrawal this summer.

The IPF, which backs strong U.S. engagement in the Middle East, has opposed a proposal to remove the president's right to waive congressional restrictions that would keep the aid from reaching the Palestinian Authority directly.

Fast-track aid of up to \$200 million has been approved by both houses of Congress, and a final version is being worked out this week by a conference committee.

MIDDLE EAST

Terrorists target prison chief

Israel's Prisons Service chief was placed under guard amid terror warnings. Ya'acov Ganot received bodyguards and a surveillance system for his office and home Tuesday, after the Shin Bet security service learned of Palestinian plans to kill or kidnap him, security sources said.

According to intelligence estimates, if Ganot were abducted the terrorists would try to trade him for comrades held in Israeli jails.

Dozens of Israeli officials, in both politics and the security services, have been put on a Shin Bet watch list since Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi was gunned down by assassins from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 2001.

Peres comes out against parade

Shimon Peres sided with religious activists in opposing a gay parade planned for Jerusalem.

Israel's vice premier said in a statement Tuesday that Jerusalem WorldPride 2005, scheduled for August, "is inappropriate as Jerusalem is the center of three faiths, and such an event could offend the sensibilities of religious people the world over."

Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who met Peres last week, said Peres told him he found the annual parade in the holy city repellant, something the elder statesman hastened to deny.

"He never said anything against homosexuals," Peres' office said.

Leftist lawmakers accused Peres of siding with religious conservatives for political gain.

Cameraman's family sues Israel

The family of a British filmmaker slain in the Gaza Strip sued Israel for \$3.8 million.

The civil-damages claim, filed in a Tel Aviv court this week, accuses the Israeli army of covering up for troops who shot James Miller in May 2003 as he was making a documentary in the flash-point Palestinian town of Rafah.

The army, which said troops believed they were firing at Palestinian gunmen during the incident, cleared the officer in charge of wrongdoing.

Miller is survived by a wife and two small children.

The footage he gathered was made posthumously into the HBO film "Death in Gaza."

Nitzanim earmarked for residence

The Israeli government agreed to relocate Gaza Strip settlers to a contested beachfront property.

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said Tuesday that the government would establish four new communities in Nitzanim, an area south of Ashkelon.

Gaza settlers, who want to move there en masse, requested the move. Environmental groups opposed the bid, fearing that a major nature reserve in Nitzanim would be damaged.

"No one has any intention to house settlers on the dunes of the nature reserve," Livni told Army Radio. "The plan includes the declaration of dunes as a nature reserve with the aim of preserving them. The residential area is slated to be alongside the reserve."

Jordanian envoy goes to kibbutz

Jordan's ambassador to Israel visited a kibbutz in southern Israel.

On Monday, Marouf Suleiman Bakhit visited Kibbutz Ketura, where he learned about environmental issues.

Later this week, students from around the world who are studying at the kibbutz's Arava Institute for Environmental Studies will visit Jerusalem to meet with top Israeli and Palestinian officials.

WORLD

University wars rage on

An online petition was launched calling on British university teachers to rescind their boycott of Israeli universities.

The petition calls the boycott by the British Association of University Teachers "counterproductive, racist, and bigoted," saying it "singles out the only Jewish State in the world for punishment, yet ignores the numerous despotic, oppressive, tyrannical, fundamentalist, and repressive regimes in the world."

It is available at <http://www.petitiononline.com/isboy05/petition.html>.

Jewish students help tsunami victims

Two students from a New York Jewish school are traveling to Thailand to distribute toys to children affected by the Southeast Asian tsunami.

Ayelet Hematian and Chantal Keypour, sixth-graders from Chabad Academy of Science and Humanities in Port Washington, N.Y., will fly to Thailand on Wednesday.

Under a program initiated by Chabad of Thailand, the students will help distribute toys to more than 700 Thai children.

The toys were collected at 120 schools in the United States.

Jewish skull buried in Sweden

A skull from a 19th-century Jew was buried in Sweden on Monday.

Levin Dombrowsky's skull was separated from the rest of his body after an 1879 autopsy and may have been used then for racial research, the Associated Press reported.

Dombrowsky, a 25-year-old immigrant from Poland, committed suicide in a Swedish jail while awaiting trial for theft.

"This dark chapter in Swedish history — racial biology — is over," Helmer Fischbein, a Jewish official in Malmo, Sweden, told the AP.