

IN THE NEWS

Hoyer looks to more aid for Israel

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said he believes the United States will approve a supplemental aid package for Israel next year.

The U.S. House of Representatives' minority whip said he believes an aid package, to develop the Negev and Galilee regions in the wake of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, will find support in the next congressional session.

Israel had been expected to ask for additional aid this year, but held off after the U.S. government incurred huge costs from fall hurricanes.

"Next year, hopefully it will get serious consideration," Hoyer said Tuesday in a meeting in New York with JTA's editorial staff.

Court petitioned over conversions

Israel's top court was asked to recognize Conservative and Reform conversions performed in the Jewish state.

The Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center filed seven High Court petitions Tuesday demanding that the Orthodox monopoly on local conversions be ended.

Earlier this year, the Reform and Conservative movements scored a judicial coup when the High Court ordered the state to recognize their converts who had studied in Israel but completed the conversion procedure abroad.

Condoleezza Rice meets P.A. official

The Palestinian Authority's top negotiator met with Condoleezza Rice.

Saeb Erekat was in Washington on Tuesday to follow up on the Rafah accord reached earlier this month, which opened up the Gaza Strip to trade and travel for the first time since Israel withdrew in early September.

Erekat welcomed the Bush administration's key role in brokering the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on Rafah.



WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

With opening of Rafah crossing, new optimism for peace progress

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The dramatic political changes in Israel seem to have impressed key players in the Arab world, and there is a newfound optimism about chances for an Israeli-Palestinian accommodation.

In rare comments on domestic Israeli politics, the leaders of Egypt and Saudi Arabia welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's decision to leave Likud and found a new centrist party, and Amir Peretz's election as Labor Party chairman, as seminal events that could take the peace process forward.

Palestinian leaders are upbeat too. They're encouraged by last Friday's opening of the Rafah border crossing, which for the first time in 37 years gives Palestinians the freedom to move in and out of the Gaza Strip without going through an Israeli-controlled checkpoint.

The opening of the crossing came more than two months after the last Israeli soldier left Gaza, and it took the personal intervention of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to broker a deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

Rafah is a particularly sensitive issue for both sides: It's the one outlet from Gaza that leads not to Israel but to Egypt and a large Arab hinterland. At the opening ceremony, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said he was confident that the newly open border was the first step toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Sharon sees the Rafah crossing as a test case; if it succeeds, Israel will be ready to go further. But critics of the open border policy such as Benjamin Netanyahu, the front-runner in the race for the vacant Likud leadership, see

it as a dangerous precedent, leading to a heavily armed Palestinian entity in Gaza and the West Bank that will threaten Israeli cities.

The fact that Egypt and Saudi Arabia are upbeat about domestic developments in Israel is not insignificant, as both countries carry considerable weight in the Arab world. Egypt helped negotiate the Rafah deal and convinced Palestinian terrorist groups to support the temporary cease-fire with Israel.

Saudi Arabia led a 2002 initiative for peace between Israel and the Arab world and recently canceled its boycott on trade with Israel, setting what could be an important precedent.

Encouraged by the new optimism among these key Arab players, Israeli officials also are quietly optimistic about chances for progress on the Palestinian track.

Arab leaders have not been afraid to go on record. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak phoned Sharon to wish him success after his split from the Likud Party and told Spain's ABC newspaper that Sharon is the only Israeli politician capable of making peace with the Palestinians.

Sharon "has the ability to take difficult decisions, commit to what he says and carry it out," Mubarak declared.

In an interview with the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper, Saudi Arabia's King Abdallah suggested that things could change for the better "after the election of Amir Peretz as chairman of the Labor Party," and he advised the Palestinians to desist from attacking Israeli civilians.

The Palestinians too are openly expressing confidence that diplomatic rather than military action can bring results. Deputy Prime

Continued on page 2

NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *The opening of the Rafah crossing gives new optimism to the peace process*

Continued from page 1

Minister Nabil Sha'ath spoke of a new mood in the wake of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, the continuing lull in violence and Peretz's election as Labor leader.

Moreover, in Palestinian primaries to choose the ruling Fatah Party's candidates for January parliamentary elections, the often militant young guard swept the boards with peace messages.

"This is a generation that wants peace and that can control the Tanzim militia men," one of the leaders, Fares Kadoura, said in an interview on Israel Radio.

Abbas called the open border with Egypt "a small dream that is part of the progress toward an independent Palestinian state whose capital is Jerusalem." He added that soon there would be more crossing points at Erez and Karni, to be followed by an airport and a land link between Gaza and the West Bank.

"We say here that Gaza is the beginning and not the end, and that additional steps will be completed in the near future in the West Bank as well," he declared.

On the Gaza side of the border, Palestinian officials will check travel documents as European and Israeli observers monitor the passage from a nearby operations room. The Israelis can indicate if they see anything suspicious, but will not be able to intervene physically to stop weapon smuggling or terrorists moving in and out of Gaza.

Israeli attitudes to the Palestinian-run Rafah crossing reflect the divide over future ties with the Palestinians. Sharon sees it as

a step toward stabilizing the situation and building on it; Netanyahu sees it as a huge strategic mistake, creating a conduit for the flow of terrorist weapons.

Netanyahu sees Gaza turning into an "Islamic, fundamentalist terror state supported by Iran" and gives little credence to the security arrangements at the crossing point.

"Today we expect the Europeans to supervise Egypt, to supervise the Palestinians, and they will supposedly stop the infiltration of weapons and terrorists," Netanyahu scoffs. He predicts that weapons flowing into Gaza "will eventually find their way to the West Bank" and "constitute a threat to Israeli cities."

The difference between Sharon and Netanyahu is over a fundamental reading of historic processes. The Netanyahu view

sees little chance of accommodation with the Palestinians, and is loathe to risk Israeli political initiatives unless the Palestinians reciprocate. The Sharon view sees a chance for incremental progress, and advocates unilateral steps by Israel if progress is blocked.

For Netanyahu, a Palestinian state would constitute a serious threat to Israel; for Sharon, it's an Israeli interest because it could stabilize an otherwise volatile situation.

Sharon's break with the Likud is designed primarily to create a new political constellation conducive to progress on the Palestinian track. That's why there's so much newfound optimism on both the Israeli and Arab sides. Time will tell whether or not it's misplaced.

The difference between Sharon and Netanyahu on Gaza is over a fundamental reading of historic processes.

Israeli actor plays terrorist on TV

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — In the upcoming Showtime television series "Sleeper Cell," Tel Aviv-born actor Oded Fehr plays Farik, the leader of a Muslim terrorist cell who poses as a synagogue-going Jewish man.

Fehr now savors the irony of the casting and plotline, but he was less enthusiastic when a producer initially approached him about the role.

"I told my agent I didn't want to do it," said Fehr, who at 34 has the tall, dark and handsome looks of an old-time Hollywood idol, as he sits outside a Starbucks in Los Angeles.

After he read the script, Fehr changed his mind. "The writing was fantastic," he said. "There was also the challenge — I have never played a role that was so far from me."

As Ferik, Fehr is chillingly convincing as the alternately menacing and personable leader of the multinational terrorist cell, plotting to spread havoc at some of the best known Los Angeles-area landmarks.

Among the likely targets considered in the opening segment are the Los Angeles International Airport, the Rose Bowl, the UCLA campus and local nuclear facilities.

The latest recruit to the six-man cell is

Darwyn (Michael Ealy), a young black man and devout Muslim, who is actually an FBI undercover agent.

He has infiltrated the cell by first posing as the inmate of a federal prison, and is steered to Farik by a fellow Black Muslim prisoner.

Darwyn first makes contact with Farik at a most unlikely place, Sinai Temple in Westwood, where the cell leader, wearing a yarmulke and tallit, poses as a regular worshipper.

He is so dedicated a congregant that he coaches the Sinai Maccabi girls softball team, wearing a blue T-shirt emblazoned with a large Star of David.

The producers of "Sleeper Cell" are obviously striving for veracity, both by setting the cell's meetings in such familiar locales as bowling alleys and children's parks, and by hiring a Pakistani-born Muslim as one of the writers.

Whether juxtaposing "good" Muslims with "bad" Muslims and making most of the terrorists European and American will make the series attractive to U.S. television viewers remains to be seen.

The 10 episodes of "Sleeper Cell," each one hour long, will air on the Showtime cable channel starting Dec. 4 and continuing through Dec. 18.

JTA
WORLD
REPORT

Daniel J. Krifcher
President
Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher
Lisa Hostein
Editor
Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor
Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director
Noa Artzi-Weill
Marketing Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Germans grapple with Nuremberg's lessons

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — Their faces stare out in black and white: the defendants of Nuremberg. Today, the rain-spattered images hang outdoors at the Topography of Terror Exhibition and Documentation Center in Berlin.

Sixty years ago, the men behind these pallid masks were tried for crimes against humanity. Many were executed. Some committed suicide in their cells.

The Nuremberg Trials, which opened with the reading of charges against 24 defendants in Berlin on Oct. 18, 1945, and reconvened in Nuremberg on Nov. 20, confronted Germans with the reality of what had been done in their name. It was the beginning of a process of reckoning and repentance that continues to this day.

How do the stories of those men, and the judges who tried them, resonate for Germans now?

The anniversary of the Trials, coming as Germany inaugurates Angela Merkel as its first chancellor born after World War II, has spawned a flood of articles in newspapers and magazines, with interviews, timelines, and considerations of the meaning of international courts today.

"At Nuremberg it came out that they planned to kill all the Jews once they took over," says Ernest Michel, 82, a Holocaust survivor who covered the Trials for a newly reconstituted German press agency and went on to become a pre-eminent Jewish activist with the UJA-Federation of New York.

Michel says, "It was the most memorable, satisfying day of my life when I was in Nuremberg, sitting there as a survivor and watching the last German high leaders being brought to justice."

The public did not always accept the results of the Trials, seeing them as "victors' justice." But Nuremberg nevertheless marked "the end of the period of terror and the beginning of a new democracy," says historian Claudia Steur, curator of the exhibit at the Topography of Terror documentation center.

"The International Court [in the Hague] was born out of the Nuremberg Trials," she says. "It was the first great trial on German soil against National

Socialism, and the first carried out by the four occupying powers. It also was the first time in history" that such a trial was conducted against a state.

Nuremberg also marked "the first time they used the word genocide," coined in 1944, says Eckard Dietzfelbinger, historian at the Documentation Center of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg.

"Since the Nuremberg Trials, governments or leaders know that their deeds could also be considered in a courtroom," says Rabbi Andreas Nachama, historian and director of the Topography of Terror center.

Today's politicians understand these messages, says Michael Wolffsohn, an historian at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich — but the general public barely pays any attention.

Despite the media coverage of the Nuremberg anniversary, "Nobody really cares, frankly speaking," Wolffsohn says. Germans "have practiced democracy successfully. The problem is not overcoming the past of national socialism," but facing "the challenges of the present."

Juliane Wetzel, who is on the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, says many young Germans turn away from the subject of the Holocaust.

Particularly this year, with the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and of the German surrender, "youngsters say they don't want hear any more about it," says Wetzel, who helped create a task force subcommittee on "resistance against Holocaust education."

The Nuremberg Trials were one of the first lessons for many Germans: In daily news dispatches, they read about atrocities committed on a vast scale. It would take many decades and many more trials before the general German public would understand that not only the top Nazis were guilty.

"The Nuremberg Trials really were instrumental in setting precedents,"

says Efraim Zuroff, chief Nazi hunter for the Simon Wiesenthal Center. "But it was clear that the Nuremberg Trials can only relate to the very, very tip of the iceberg of the criminality of Nazi Germany and those who assisted Nazi Germany."

Zuroff estimates there were 90,000 indictments in West Germany after 1949, and 7,000 people were convicted. East Germany also conducted war crimes trials.

All in all, "a very small percentage of those who participated in the crimes of the Holocaust were indicted," Zuroff says, because once the allies were no longer in charge of post-war German courts, the will to prosecute was weak.

After the first trial, there was pressure from the U.S. State Department to ease up, says Lawrence Raful, dean of the Touro Law School in New York, which held a conference in Nuremberg's courtroom last summer.

The U.S. administration's message was, "We have punished the Germans, and the Cold War has started. We need to win the hearts and minds of the German people, because as bad as the Nazis were, the communists are worse," Raful says.

That was a tough message for Holocaust survivors, like his parents, to accept, says Raful.

Meanwhile, the voices of the trials' judges and lawyers, and even some of the defendants declaring themselves not guilty, can be heard in Berlin from small loudspeakers at the outdoor photographic exhibit at the Topography of Terror.

"One can hear the original sound," says curator Steur, who recently accompanied Ernest Michel on a visit to the exhibit. "I have seen parents or grandparents with their children, standing in front of the map of the zones of Allied occupation" of Germany. For some, it's the start of a long-overdue conversation.

"We're proud that we had the trials," Steur says. But "when you know how many of the old Nazis in the German Democratic Republic went back to their old positions — doctors, judges and police — it's sad."

Young Germans say they don't want hear any more about it.

Juliane Wetzel

Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

U.S., Israel discuss Iran

Iran was a focus of the renewed Israel-U.S. strategic dialogue. "Discussions covered a broad range of regional issues," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement Tuesday.

"Both sides also expressed concern at the Iranian government's growing radicalization and its irresponsible policy on nuclear issues."

The dialogue, which resumed Monday, had been suspended for three years because of U.S. displeasure over Israeli arms sales to China.

A memorandum of understanding signed this summer gives the United States a veto on Israeli arms sales.

Leading the dialogue are Tzachi Hanegbi, an Israeli Cabinet minister; and Nicholas Burns, a U.S. undersecretary of state.

Suicide bombing foiled

Israeli security forces foiled a planned Palestinian suicide bombing. Troops arrested eight suspected terrorists Tuesday in the West Bank, including a Jenin man belonging to Islamic Jihad.

According to the army, the Islamic Jihad member was involved in planning last month's suicide bombing in Hadera that killed six Israelis, and was about to order a new attack.

Graveyard pictures stir ire

Unauthorized images of the exhumation of bodies from a Gaza Jewish cemetery were posted on the Internet.

The amateur photographs, showing military rabbis alongside coffins containing some of the 48 bodies disinterred from the Gush Katif cemetery in August, appeared on an Israeli Web site this week, drawing condemnation from former Gaza settlers.

"This is an outrage," said Dan Davidovich, whose daughter Ahuva was killed by Palestinians and buried in Gush Katif.

"They would not agree to us being there during the evacuation as it was a sensitive situation, and they said it would take place with the proper dignity and would not be photographed," he told Ma'ariv.

The army said the incident was under investigation.

NORTH AMERICA

Jewish leaders meet new German official

Jewish officials met in New York with Germany's new foreign minister.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in the United States for talks with American officials, met separately Monday with Jewish leaders from the American Jewish Committee, the World Jewish Congress, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Leo Baeck Institute.

The Jewish officials said they discussed issues ranging from the allocation of funds to home-bound Holocaust survivors to German-Jewish relations to Germany playing a role in fostering interreligious dialogue in Europe among Jews, Christians and Muslims.

"We dealt with all of the outstanding issues that the Claims Conference will have to deal with the new government on," said Rabbi Israel Singer, chairman of the WJC.

Rate of circumcision down

The rate of circumcision in the United States is decreasing, even as evidence suggests that it may protect against HIV infection, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Some 55.9 percent of baby boys born in the United States in 2003 were circumcised, as opposed to 63.5 percent in 1993, though the rate of circumcision of Jewish boys is believed to be higher than in the general population.

A study performed in South Africa found that circumcised men are far less likely to contract HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Canada to establish Mideast peace center

Canada will establish a center to provide wide-ranging support for peace efforts in the West Bank, Gaza and throughout the Middle East, Canada's foreign affairs minister announced yesterday.

The Canada Centre for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East will provide a platform for increased Canadian activity with both the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and will serve as "a concrete symbol of Canada's dedication to supporting Palestinians in their nation-building," Pierre Pettigrew said.

WORLD

Syria opposes relief-agency accord

Syrian objections seem unlikely to scuttle an accord paving the way for Magen David Adom's acceptance in the International Red Cross.

"This agreement was hammered out and everyone wants to see it done, therefore it is highly unlikely that Syria would be able to derail it," officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies told a delegation of U.S. congressmen Monday in Geneva, Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) told JTA.

A recent pact between Magen David Adom and the Palestinian Red Crescent guarantees Palestinian ambulances speedier passage through West Bank checkpoints.

In addition, the sides agreed in principle on a non-denominational red diamond emblem, as Muslim states refuse to recognize the red Star of David.

A resolution to be discussed next week among Geneva Convention signatories would officially introduce the new emblem. Engel characterized the Syrian objections as "nonsense and mischief."

The congressional delegation also included Reps. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), Silvestre Reyes (D-Tex.), Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), Candice Miller (R-Mich.) and Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.).

E.U. official blasts Hamas

Hamas will remain on the European Union's list of terrorist organizations until it renounces violence and recognizes the State of Israel, E.U. officials said. E.U.'s ambassador to Israel, Ramiro Cibrián-Uzal, made the comments Monday to reporters.

At the same time, Cibrián-Uzal said he respected the Palestinian Authority's decision to allow Hamas to participate in Palestinian legislative elections slated for January.

Slovakia pays compensation

Slovakia has begun issuing compensation payments to Jews for property confiscated between 1938-45.

Out of 1,400 applications, most from heirs in the U.S. and Israel, 350 were accepted, 400 were rejected and the rest are still pending.

Compensation ranges from \$1,117 to \$3,100 per claim and is limited in accordance with a Holocaust compensation fund set up by the government in 2002.

Jewish group sets up computer labs

A Jewish group teamed up with a computer giant to open computer labs in Russia and Israel.

The centers in Samara, Russia, and Kiryat Bialik, Israel, are the first of four such centers to be set up by World ORT and Hewlett-Packard.

The centers aim to increase technology use in small businesses in underserved communities.