

## IN THE NEWS

**Olmert: Disarm Hamas**

There will be no negotiations with a Palestinian Authority led by Hamas, Israel's acting prime minister said.

"The State of Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian administration if its members include an armed terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel; in any case, Israel will continue to fight terrorism with a heavy hand, everywhere," Ehud Olmert said Thursday, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office.

Olmert spoke during a consultation with security chiefs, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, a day after Hamas won a landslide victory in Palestinian legislative elections.

**No dealing with Hamas, says Bush**

President Bush said the United States would not deal with a Hamas-led government if it doesn't renounce its goal of destroying Israel. "I've made it very clear that the United States does not support political parties that want to destroy our ally Israel, and that people must renounce that part of their platform," Bush said Thursday.

**Dip reported in global anti-Semitism**

The Jewish Agency for Israel reported a dip in anti-Semitic incidents worldwide last year.

Agency chairman Zeev Bielski and Israel's Diaspora minister, Avraham Hirschson, presented the 2005 data Thursday at a news conference held by the Global Forum Against Anti-Semitism. According to the findings, there were fewer anti-Semitic incidents in Britain, France, Belgium and the Czech Republic compared to the prior year. However, Russia and Ukraine saw a considerable increase in anti-Semitic incidents.

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# WORLD REPORT

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



Brian Hendler

Palestinian children display Hamas and Palestinian flags near the Central Election Committee buildings in Ramallah, Jan. 24, 2006.

## As Hamas savors victory, U.S. and Europeans may cut off aid

By **RON KAMPEAS**

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — Hamas leaders savoring their stunning electoral victory might contemplate the first likely casualty: funding for a Palestinian Authority that is on the verge of bankruptcy.

President Bush, who defied Congress last year to hand over \$50 million to the Palestinian Authority, made clear he would not have a comparable relationship with a Hamas government.

"The United States does not support political parties that want to destroy our ally Is-

rael, and that people must renounce that part of their platform," Bush said Thursday, after it became clear that Hamas had trounced P.A.

President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah Party in legislative elections.

Bush already was garnering an international consensus on the issue; his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, spent much of Thursday consulting with U.S. allies, and it apparently paid off.

By the end of the day, European leaders were echoing Bush's statement.

"We can only do business with people who renounce terrorism," a spokesman for

*Continued on page 2*

**NEWS ANALYSIS**

## The U.S. expressed hope that Abbas would retain the P.A. presidency

Continued from page 1

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, and the sentiment was echoed by Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister. European officials predicted unanimity on the topic when the European Union's 25 foreign ministers meet Monday.

Bush cautioned that the dust had yet to settle: Abbas, a relative moderate favored by the United States and Israel, remains as P.A. president, and Hamas — which appeared surprised by its victory — has yet to announce its plans for governance.

"We'd like him to stay in power," Bush said of Abbas.

Yet the emerging consensus among Americans, U.S. Jewish leaders, Israelis and Palestinian moderates was that a Cabinet led by a Hamas prime minister fundamentally changes the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic — and not for the better.

"Tsunami," said Diana Buttu, an adviser to Abbas until last year.

"An unmitigated disaster," said David Makovsky, an analyst for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Until Wednesday, the argument was whether Fatah would win an outright victory or whether it would have to include Hamas in government, and how the world should react. Some U.S. officials were discussing the model in Lebanon, where U.S. officials deal with all government ministers except the one representing Hezbollah, a group that, like Hamas, is on the U.S. State Department's list of terrorist groups.

Instead, Hamas won 76 seats in the 132-member Parliament, compared to 43 for Fatah and 13 for smaller parties.

Makovsky said the United States would have to work hard to maintain the international consensus on isolating a Hamas-led government.

"The main event is to leverage aid and to make sure the U.S. is not alone," Makovsky said Thursday in a conference call organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Such leverage would be potent because Hamas is about to inherit a Palestinian Authority on the verge of bankruptcy, the result of years of pervasive corruption and thieving by some Fatah leaders. It will be able to pay the P.A.'s 170,000 salaries — the mainstay of the Palestinian economy — only through the middle of February.

Isolating Hamas represents a spent formula, Buttu argued in a conference call organized by the Israel Policy Forum, a Jewish group that encourages greater U.S. involvement in the peace process. Instead, the West should try to moderate Hamas through offers of assistance, she said.

"The future is to bolster Abu Mazen and the voices that really want to see peace," she said, using Abbas' nom de guerre. The result of isolation "has been to bolster Hamas."

Such arguments may be beside the point right now, said Samar Assad, who directs the Palestine Center, a Washington think tank. Hamas is unlikely to change decades of rejectionist ideology overnight, and in any case its most immediate concern is a society on the verge of collapse.

"They don't want to come out and say to the people who voted for them that all of a sudden 'we're going to do a 180-degree turn,'" Assad said. "They will focus on a government and on domestic issues, and later, when they realize certain domestic issues can't be accomplished without dealing with the reality of Israel, they will have to soften."

At that point, the Europeans and the

Bush administration might be readier to accommodate an arrangement. But that would encounter fierce resistance in Congress, which last month overwhelmingly

passed legislation warning of financial consequences if Palestinians elect Hamas to government.

"I don't think there's any reasonable expectation that Hamas will change," Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), a cosponsor of the legislation, told JTA.

"There's nothing Hamas has said or done that would give any hope whatsoever. The Palestinian people made their bed with Hamas, and now they can sleep with it," he said.

Congress exercises oversight over funds for the Palestinians, and another \$200 million is available in addition to the \$50 million Bush handed over last year. Bush used a national-security waiver to bypass Congress in that case, but he's much less likely to exercise that option in dealing with a Hamas government.

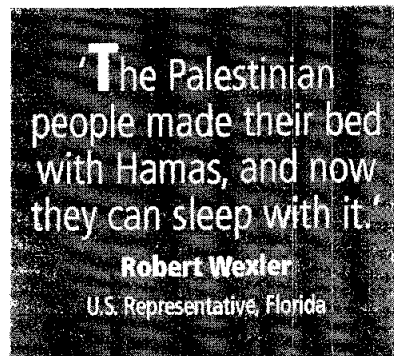
U.S. Jewish groups, ranging from Americans for Peace Now to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, were virtually unanimous in pledging to maintain a political climate that would keep Hamas isolated.

Recognizing Israel's right to exist and ending violence "should be a precondition for any direct international aid to the new Palestinian government," Americans for Peace Now said. AIPAC had a similar message, calling on "the United States and its allies to uphold their policy of not dealing with Hamas and other terrorist groups."

Stephen Cohen, a scholar who advises the Israel Policy Forum, said such views could be counterproductive.

"The danger of the American Jewish community is that it pays so much attention to the ideological stance of Palestinian movements," said Cohen, who has met with Hamas figures. He recommended incremental steps.

"We have to make sure that American Jewry does not turn too much on the formal insistence of the change of the covenant," Cohen said. That could lead to "years of conflict and armed struggle." ■



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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](http://www.jta.org).  
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# After Hamas win, it's business as usual in Israel

By **URIEL HEILMAN**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With international attention focused on Gaza and the West Bank after Hamas' surprising victory in Palestinian elections, many Israelis took in the news of the terrorist group's success with a combination of astonishment and fatalism.

Successive hourly bulletins Thursday brought news of Hamas' victory margin to ever more stunning proportions, and Israeli political commentators described the developments as a "political earthquake."

Yet many Israelis seemed resigned to the news.

"What can I tell you? This topic is so difficult and painful," said Elisheva Melamed-Cohen of Jerusalem. "I feel like I almost live in Palestine when I listen to the radio. But lately I prefer not to hear the news."

In a country still reeling from the sudden political loss of its own larger-than-life prime minister, Ariel Sharon, news of Hamas' rise to power seemed almost too much to digest. While the Israeli punditry went into full-mobilization mode, many ordinary Israelis simply took the news as more of the same.

"Most Israelis see most Palestinians as all the same thing, so for them Hamas and Fatah are the same thing," observed Shoshana Halper, a left-wing activist who works at Israel's Open University.

"What worries me about Hamas is not their 'terrorism' but that it's an organization that is religious, fundamentalist and anti-woman," she said. "That's the frightening thing here."

Most Israelis were surprised by the developments, but not particularly alarmed.

In downtown Jerusalem, reporters from around the world broadcast from bustling street corners while crowds of Israelis and tourists went about business as usual, buying jewelry on Ben Yehudah Street's pedestrian promenade, haggling with taxi drivers and eating frozen yogurt.

The round-the-clock news coverage that greeted Ariel Sharon's stroke earlier this month was absent Thursday. Few Israeli radio and TV stations interrupted their regular programming, and stories about Friday's first-ever international day of remembrance for the Holocaust made

all the evening news programs.

"What was the final thing — Hamas took 40 percent?" Yomtov Groner, founder of a kosher tour company, asked when queried about the election's results.

When told of Hamas' landslide win, Groner, unfazed, pronounced the outcome "very predictable after what happened this past summer."

"Israel disengaged," he said, referring to the Gaza

withdrawal, "and the perception that was given among the Palestinians is the fact that terrorism is working, that Hamas is doing a very effective job of getting Israel out of the Middle East."

Like many Israelis, Groner took the outcome as a sign of Palestinian disgust with corruption in the ruling Fatah Party, as much as enthusiasm for Hamas ideology.

Privately, many Israelis say Hamas would make a better negotiating partner than Fatah, since Hamas actually does what it says and can deliver on its promises.

"Only the extremists are those who can make peace," said Ari Sturm, a resident of the West Bank Jewish settlement of Kedumim. "Only when Sharon broke left did the left support him. When Hamas breaks left for the sake of peace, Fatah will give it support."

Still Sturm said, he did not believe peace was close at hand.

"I think peace will be possible only when the Palestinians decide to stop inciting against us in the schools, in the media," he said. In the meantime, he cautioned, "terror will be renewed."

Few in Israel believe that in the short term there can be a productive dialogue with Hamas, a group that has made the destruction of Israel one of its central tenets. But Shimon Peres, Israel's former prime minister, did not rule out hope for the future.

"Democracy is not a 24-hour thing," he said in a television interview. Stressing that Israel is opposed to Hamas' ideology rather than its mere existence, Peres explained, "We do not fight a name; we're fighting positions. If they change, it will

be a different story."

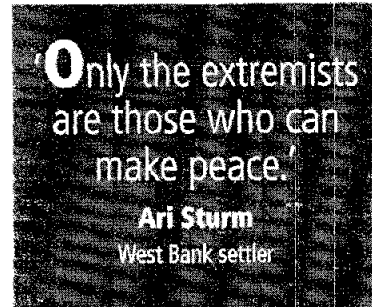
In the days before the election, Israeli media closely monitored developments in Gaza and the West Bank, including an unprecedented "Nightline"-style TV debate between Palestinian Authority Civil Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan and Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar.

Dahlan was perceived as the hands-down victor in the debate, portions of

which were rebroadcast in translation on Israeli TV.

The winner at the ballot box, however, indisputably was Hamas. That leaves Israel — and the rest of the Western world — with a conundrum: What do you do when a nation freely chooses a group that espouses terrorist rejectionism?

"A nation votes — what can you do? You can't tell another nation what government to choose," Halper said.



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## Economic chief apologizes for anti-Israel screed

DAVOS, Switzerland (JTA) — The chairman of the World Economic Forum apologized for an anti-Israel article in the forum's official magazine.

Klaus Schwab, chairman and executive director of the Davos World Economic Forum, offered a sweeping apology Thursday to all delegates for an article calling for a boycott of Israel that appeared in a prestigious magazine issued by the forum.

Schwab, who founded the annual Davos conclave 35 years ago, said he was "shocked" to read the article in the Global Agenda magazine, Ha'aretz reported.

The article called on nations to boycott Israel until it ends its "apartheid-like" treatment of the Palestinians, and said Zionism was based on an "outdated colonial model."

Schwab said he would apologize to a full meeting of the forum on Friday.

# Israeli candidates, lists, issues and angles

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The upcoming Israeli election promises to be one of the most important since 1967, and could decide the fate of most of the territory Israel captured in that year's Six Day War.

It also could help consolidate Israel's place in the Middle East — and have significant ramifications for resources allocated to education and the fight against poverty.

Given Israel's system of proportional representation, dozens of parties will vie for power. So who are the main players? What do the various parties stand for? What are the key issues? And how does the system work?

## THE PLAYERS:

The main players are the three leaders with genuine prime ministerial aspirations:

- **Ehud Olmert**, 60, Kadima Party leader and acting prime minister. A Knesset member at the age of 28, Olmert has held the health, trade and industry, and finance portfolios, and served a decade as mayor of Jerusalem.

He is a lawyer with degrees in philosophy and psychology. He will try to convince voters that he is the true heir of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

- **Amir Peretz**, 53, leader of the Labor Party and former boss of the Histadrut trade union federation. Peretz was born in Morocco, came to Israel at age four and became a Knesset member in 1988 after serving as mayor of the southern border town of Sderot.

With no ministerial experience or academic qualifications, his primary task will be to convince voters that he has the makings of a prime minister.

- **Benjamin Netanyahu**, 56, Likud Party leader and former prime minister. The son of a history professor, Netanyahu was born in Jerusalem but spent his formative years in the United States, where he attained a degree in business administration from MIT.

The most experienced of the three candidates, he has served as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, foreign minister, finance minister and prime minister. Despite his qualifications, Netanyahu starts the race at a serious disadvantage: His term as prime minister is widely regarded as a failure, he is blamed for reviving the economy in recent years on the backs of Israel's poor and for causing the split in the Likud by making Sharon's position as party leader intolerable.

## THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM:

Since the founding of the state in 1948, Israeli politics has suffered from inherent instability. Trying to hold together a society of veterans and immigrants, religious and secular, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, with a significant Arab minority, Israel opted for a system of proportional representation.

The upshot was a plethora of parties, unwieldy coalitions and 31 governments in 55 years. In the late 1990s, in an effort to strengthen the central government, Israel instituted a system of direct election of the prime minister.

The new system granted voters two ballots — one for prime minister and the other for the party of their choice — but instead of a more stable government, it produced greater fragmentation. After choosing their candidate for prime minister, many voters used the second ballot to vote for small, single-issue parties, decimating the larger, nationally oriented parties like Labor and Likud and leading to even more unwieldy multiparty coalitions.

By the time the last election came around, in January 2003, Israel had restored the old system, but with two significant changes designed to promote stability: The first, "constructive no-confidence," stipulated that winning a simple majority in a no-confidence vote no longer was enough to force a sitting prime minister out of office. Instead, it would take an absolute majority of 61 Knesset members in the 120-member Parliament, and they would have to unite around an alternative candidate for prime minister.

The revised system also made it more difficult for small parties to make it into the Knesset, raising the parliamentary threshold from 1.5 percent to 2 percent, or some 70,000-80,000 votes.

The 2006 elections will operate according to this revised version of the old system. Israelis will vote with a single ballot for the party of their choice, and each party will win a number of Knesset seats directly proportional to its share of the vote. Parties that fail to garner at least 2 percent of the vote will not get any seats.

The leader of the party most likely to be able to form a new government — invariably the party that wins most seats — will be invited by the president to begin coalition negotiations.

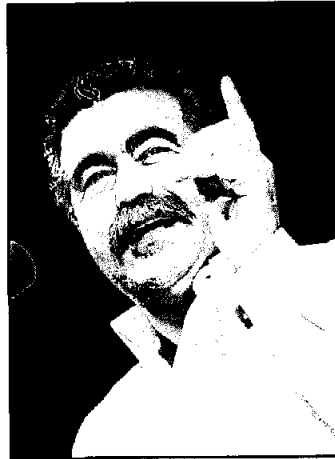
## THE PARTIES AND THE ISSUES:

- **Kadima:** Formed by Sharon in November when he split from the Likud, its overarching policy thrust is to continue the process of separation from the Palestinians that was started by the withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank last summer. Kadima spokesmen say this should be by agree-

### ISRAELI ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Ehud Olmert.



Amir Peretz.



Benjamin Netanyahu.

Brian Hendler

Brian Hendler

ment with the Palestinians but imply that if not, there will be more unilateral withdrawals.

• **Labor:** To make up for Peretz's lack of experience, Labor will highlight its list of Knesset candidates. On foreign affairs and defense, it will argue that its approach is similar to Kadima's; but it will assert that the main threat to Israeli society is the growing gap between rich and poor, which it alone intends to address.

• **Likud:** To avoid appearing too right-wing or irrelevant, Likud will gravitate toward the center, emphasizing that it too seeks separation from the Palestinians. Netanyahu says the difference between Likud and Kadima or Labor is that the latter parties would withdraw to the pre-1967 borders, whereas he would move the separation fence deeper into the West Bank and hold on to the Jordan Valley.

• **Shinui:** The third-largest party with 15 seats in the last Knesset, the secular, centrist Shinui may disappear from the political arena without having achieved any of its major goals: army service for Yeshiva students, civil marriage and equality between the various streams of Judaism in Israel. After bitter personal clashes, the party is on the verge of splitting in two, and polls show that neither wing would cross the 2 percent threshold.

• **Tafnit:** A new centrist party led by former National Security Adviser Uzi Dayan. Running on an anti-corruption ticket, it too seems unlikely to win enough votes to cross the threshold. Talks between Tafnit and some Shinui breakaways so far have failed to produce a merger.

• **Shas:** The fervently Orthodox Sephardi party will campaign for a restoration of religious values and an end to alleged discrimination against religious and Sephardi Jews, but without the secular challenge posed by Shinui, it will find it more difficult to mobilize support. It also may see some of its traditional Sephardi voters migrate to Labor because of Peretz's Moroccan roots.

• **United Torah Judaism:** A sectoral party that appeals to haredi, or fervently Orthodox, Ashkenazi Jews, and is capable of forming a coalition with parties of the left, right or center.

• **National Religious Party:** A right-wing, Zionist religious party that appeals

to non-haredi Orthodox Jews. Much of its support has tended to come from Jewish settlers, but the party now is playing down its Greater Israel philosophy and emphasizing the need to strengthen Jewish identity through Jewish education. Polls show it hovering close to the minimum threshold.

• **National Union:** A one-issue, Greater Israel pro-settler party. Its Moledet wing advocates the voluntary transfer of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to third countries.

• **Yisrael Beiteinu:** A right-wing party with a large Russian immigrant base, it proposes land swaps with a future Palestinian state that would leave many Israeli Arabs on the Palestinian side of the border.

• **Meretz:** The most dovish of the Zionist parties, it emphasizes its readiness to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders and divide Jerusalem in the context of an agreement with the Palestinians.

• **Arab parties:** The Communist Hadash party, the secular Balad and the Islamicist United Arab List are dominated by Israeli Arabs and claim to represent Arab interests and rights. But their main focus has been on regional politics and Palestinian claims, leading many Israeli

Arabs to say that this time they will vote for Zionist parties like Kadima and Labor that might do more to address local Israeli Arab concerns. The result could be some Arab parties not making the threshold.

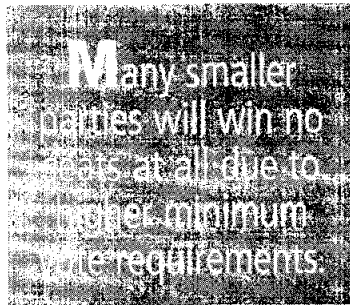
• **Special interest parties:** In previous elections, one-issue parties for everything from the legalization of marijuana to the banning of taxes have run, but usually failed to make it to the Knesset.

**THE TIMETABLE:**

Candidate lists must be presented to the Central Election Committee on Feb. 8 or 9. That will leave a bit less than seven weeks for all-out campaigning that will include billboards, newspaper ads, public meetings and party political broadcasts.

Just over 5 million registered voters will be eligible to cast their ballots March 28 in hundreds of polling stations, usually school rooms temporarily converted for the purpose. An 80 percent turnout, not uncommon in Israel, will mean 4 million votes cast and one Knesset seat per 33,000 votes — assuming a party crosses the minimum threshold.

The morning after, the coalition-building will begin. The kind of coalition that the winner puts together — left-leaning or right-leaning, with religious parties or without — will offer a clue to the policies the new government is likely to adopt.



Brian Hendler

An Israeli man votes in the country's last general elections in Jerusalem on Jan. 28, 2003.

# Austrian Holocaust survivors get some closure

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The expulsion and extermination of 182,000 Austrian Jews during the Nazi era is a wound that will never heal completely, but two important decisions during recent weeks at least point to a symbolic closure for the dwindling number of survivors and the Austrian government.

In a high-profile case, Maria Altmann won her seven-year battle to recover from Austria five famous paintings looted by the Nazis from her uncle, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer.

Meanwhile, after an even longer period of legal and diplomatic wrangling, a court decision has cleared the final hurdle for payment of restitution money to survivors or the heirs of victims.

The Altmann case ended when the Austrian government accepted the decision of an arbitration court in Vienna that the paintings, by Gustav Klimt, belonged to Altmann, 89, and four relatives.

The decisive ruling in favor of Altmann is “the most important victory in the entire history of litigation on Holocaust restitution,” said Michael Bazylar of Whittier Law School in California, whose latest book, “Holocaust Restitution: Perspectives on the Litigation and Its Legacy,” has just been published.

The most famous of the paintings is a gold-flecked portrait of Altmann’s aunt, Adele Bloch-Bauer, currently a centerpiece of the Austrian National Gallery and one of the most reproduced pictures of all time.

There are still some loose ends to be tied up, especially whether Austria will try to buy the Adele portrait, considered a national treasure, from Altmann.

The portrait is valued at about \$100 million, and the government has said it cannot afford the sum, which is equal to the annual budget for all Austrian museums.

Austria hopes that a private donor might step up.

The other Klimt works are a second portrait of Bloch-Bauer and three landscapes.

A bizarre touch was added last week, when E. Randol Schoenberg, Altmann’s attorney, received an anonymous e-mail whose sender threatened to destroy the

Klimt paintings in order for “hungry people to get bread.”

Austrian authorities temporarily removed the paintings from the National Gallery, and then arrested a 50-year-old man, tracked down through his Internet provider. The unidentified man claimed that he was drunk when he sent the e-mail.

Though Altmann has said she would not change her lifestyle after receiving compensation, she plans “to do something” for the Jewish communities in Austria and the United States,

and for Israel. Once the money is in hand, she also hopes to realize her long-held dream of sponsoring a performance by the Los Angeles Opera, starring her idol, tenor Placido Domingo. The event would be dedicated to her late husband, whose ambitions for an operatic career were cut short when he had to flee Austria.

Altmann said she had urged Austria seven years ago to arbitrate the dispute, “but I never got a response back.”

While the Altmann case has made the headlines, it is only part of the larger question of Austria’s responsibility toward Nazi victims.

In the postwar decades, Austria, whose native son Adolf Hitler incorporated it into the Third Reich during the 1938 Anschluss, played the role of “first victim” of Nazism, guiltless of the Holocaust and other atrocities.

This attitude changed in the mid-1990s, when the Austrian president admitted for the first time that his country, most of whose citizens jubilantly welcomed Hitler, bore its share of blame for Nazi crimes.

In 1995, the Austrian Parliament established the National Fund for Victims of National Socialism, which over the past 10 years has appropriated some \$770 million under various programs compensating for loss of property, education, pensions, tenancy rights, and for slave labor and hardship cases.

But Austria held back some \$210 million, until the government was guaranteed that no subsequent class action suits against Austrian businesses would be filed by survivors.

Last month, a U.S. District Court in New York dismissed all such class-action suits, a decision welcomed by the Claims Conference, which negotiated with Austria on behalf of survivors.

The first payments to some 19,000 claimants in 69 countries are to start in December and should be completed one year later, said Hannah Lessing, secretary general of the Austrian National Fund. Lessing was in Los Angeles last week to meet with survivors, accompanied by the Austrian consul general, Martin Weiss.

Lessing was born in Vienna in 1963, the daughter of a Jewish photographer who had fled from Vienna to British Mandate Palestine in 1939, but returned to his native city after the war. He left behind his mother and grandmother, who both perished in Auschwitz.

Lessing’s non-Jewish mother, with Hannah and her siblings, formally converted to Judaism in 1973.

When Lessing switched from her career as a banker five years ago to accept her present position, she insisted on a proactive policy of seeking out survivors, open access for claimants to her offices, and a minimum of red tape.

Nevertheless, she acknowledged criticism that the process is still too slow and complex, especially given the advanced age of the remaining survivors.

“There are only some 12,500 Austrian survivors still alive, and every time one dies, we lose,” she said.

Lessing also wishes that she could raise the payment rate for Jewish property lost during the Nazi era, which now stands at only 10 percent to 15 percent of current valuation.

“No amount of money can ever make up for the suffering of the Holocaust,” she concluded. “Whatever we do is meant as a gesture of reconciliation toward our former citizens.”

One looted painting awarded by the court is a \$100 million Klimt. Austria's national gallery, which holds it now, doesn't have the funds to purchase it.

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Foreign Oscar hopefuls

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Early in the morning of Jan. 31 here, some sleepy official will read off the nominations for the 78th Academy Awards, including foreign film nominations from 58 countries.

The Israeli entry is unlikely to be nominated, but the German, Hungarian, and Palestinian entries should be of special interest to Jewish viewers.

"Paradise Now," which follows two suicide bombers from Nablus in their painstaking preparations to blow up a Tel Aviv bus, re-enforced its frontrunner status earlier this month when it picked up the Golden Globe award for best foreign film.

"Sophie Scholl: The Final Days," Germany's official entry, is a tribute to a small group of German students who posted anti-Nazi leaflets throughout Germany at the height of World War II.

Sophie Scholl was the only woman at the core of the underground resistance group the White Rose. Despite her discovery and execution, the film's message and portrayal of her is hopeful and defiant.

Hungary's entry, "Fateless," has won high critical acclaim but is probably too ambiguous to win Oscar recognition.

The story is based on a novel by Hungarian Jewish writer Imre Kertesz, and it is told through the eyes of 14-year-old Gyuri Kovacs, who is randomly taken off a bus, sent to Auschwitz and other camps, and survives and returns to Budapest.

While not shrinking from the horror of the camps, "Fateless" is told through a boy's personal perspective and often has an almost dreamlike quality.

In the ironically titled "What a Wonderful Place," the Israeli entry, the focus is on the mistreatment of foreign workers, which is a real-enough Israeli problem.

But what we get from director Eyal Halperin is a lineup of Israelis who pimp and rape imported Russian prostitutes, beat their foreign farm workers, cheat on their spouses, and commit suicide.

Oddly enough, the Israeli film industry submits "Wonderful Place" and similar downers even while the overall level of Israeli movies has steadily improved. ■

## Ukrainian TV nixes Jewish show

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Ukrainian Jews are disappointed by the decision of Ukrainian state television to cancel its Jewish-themed weekly show.

Reasons given for the show's cancellation have been mixed. Many Jewish groups and the show's producers said that the show's criticism of a prominent public figure known for his anti-Semitism directly caused the show to be nixed. State television officials — and some Jewish figures as well — said the show suffered from a lack of quality.

"Mazel Tov" covered Jewish life in Ukraine and abroad, Jewish traditions, culture and issues of concern to the Jewish community. The only Jewish-themed show on Ukrainian state television, "Mazel Tov" lasted for five seasons, and was a successor to the country's first Jewish television show, "Yahad."

Vadim Rabinovich, president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress and the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, told a Jan. 18 news conference that the National Television Company of Ukraine, or NTKU, canceled the show because it was critical of Georgy Schokin. Schokin is the head of MAUP, a private Kiev university whose leaders triggered international condemnation for their repeated anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist statements.

Although company officials and others questioned the quality of the show, Rabinovich and several Jewish leaders suggested that politics motivated the decision. ■

Rabinovich, whose own company produced the "Mazel Tov" show for the state-owned UT-1 channel, said that he was given an ultimatum by a top-level state television manager to stop criticism of Schokin to avoid the show's cancellation.

"Our TV company refused to accept the blackmail," and as of Jan. 1, the agreement between the channel and his company was revoked and the show was canceled, Rabinovich said.

In response to JTA's inquiry, a state television representative said that the manager in question, Oleg Kuzan, a state television vice president, retired from the

company on Nov. 1.

State television management denied Rabinovich's accusations, saying that the cancellation of the 20-minute show was due to its low ratings — and that some other shows were canceled alongside the Jewish one. ■

Vitaly Dokalenko, state television president, told JTA that the cancellation of "Mazel Tov" was nothing but a part of the company's "production process" aimed solely at improving the quality of the channel.

Moreover, Dokalenko added, state television had long consultations with the show's producers on how to improve its popularity with the viewers but nothing had changed.

"Mr. Rabinovich, on behalf of the Jewish community, is now demanding to bring back the "Mazel Tov" show on the air in its old form, and I only insist on having a high-quality TV show about Jewish people,"

Dokalenko said.

But Vladimir Orlov, director general of AITI, the company that produced "Mazel Tov," told JTA that Dokalenko had demanded to change the entire concept of the show.

According to Orlov, "in our meetings, Mr. Dokalenko demanded that our show should cover only cultural aspects of Jewish life and not touch some political issues."

Orlov said the producers will soon present a new concept of the show to state television shortly.

Some other leaders believe that cancellation of the show was inspired by anti-Semitism.

"I'm sure that this is an anti-Semitic act of those who support MAUP," said Eduard Dolinsky, executive director of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine.

Josef Zissels, leader of the Ukrainian Va'ad, an umbrella organization, disagreed: "We should investigate the case and return a Jewish show on the airwaves of the national television as soon as possible."

But Zissels remarked that the show as it existed was also of a dubious quality and did not reflect the variety of Jewish life while "covering mainly Rabinovich and his organizations." ■



# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDEAST

### Carter: Give Hamas a chance

Former President Carter urged the international community to fund a Hamas-led Palestinian government.

"The Palestinian government is destitute, and in desperate financial straits. I hope that support for the new government will be forthcoming," Carter said at a Jerusalem press conference Thursday.

He added that if international law barred donor countries from directly funding a government led by Hamas — which the United States and others consider a terrorist organization — money could be given to the Palestinians via non-governmental channels.

Carter, who led an international observer team that pronounced the vote free and fair, said Hamas might act "responsibly" once it took power.

### Sharon's son apologizes for scandal

Ariel Sharon's son apologized for illicitly funding his father's 1999 run to head the Likud Party.

"I made mistakes, serious mistakes, and I'm sorry for it," Omri Sharon told the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court on Wednesday in closing arguments before he is sentenced as part of a plea bargain. Sharon pleaded guilty last year to fraud and bribery in connection with the Likud primary in 1999, saying he illegally solicited foreign funding without his father's knowledge.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been cleared in the funding case.

### Sharon to get long-term care?

Ariel Sharon could be moved to a coma-care hospital. Two doctors from Loewenstein Hospital Rehabilitation Center, which specializes in long-term care for comatose patients, visited the Israeli prime minister's bedside Wednesday.

Political sources said that Sharon, 77, who has been unconscious since a Jan. 4 stroke, could eventually be moved to Loewenstein if doctors at Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital in Ein Kerem do not succeed in reviving him.

### Taiwan, Israel ink tech pact

Taiwan recently signed its first governmental pact with Israel on technological cooperation.

Ruth Kahanoff, director of the Israel Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei, which serves as Israel's defacto embassy in Taiwan in the absence of official diplomatic relations, signed the agreement in late January with Taiwanese officials from the country's National Science Council. Earlier in the month, a representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Tel Aviv signed the same document with Israeli officials there.

Key areas for cooperation will be nanotechnology and biotechnology, council officials said.

## WORLD

### Israel welcomes International Holocaust Day

Ehud Olmert voiced hope that International Holocaust Day would help fight anti-Semitism. Israel's acting prime minister chaired a special Cabinet session at Yad Vashem on Thursday before the U.N.-declared global memorial day Friday.

"I hope that this step will lead to the awareness of the Holocaust being instilled in many publics around the world, which for years tried to evade the need to deal with the Holocaust in all its aspects," Olmert told fellow ministers. "I also hope that this step will lead to a reduction in anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, which in recent years, to my regret, we have witnessed with concern."

### Report: Holocaust denial widespread in Russia

Holocaust denial is a widespread phenomenon in Russia, especially on the Internet, a report said.

At least four Russian Web sites are devoted to Holocaust denial, according to the report published on the eve of international Holocaust Memorial Day.

According to the report by the Moscow-based Holocaust Foundation and the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights, one of the Web sites, [www.revisio.msk.ru](http://www.revisio.msk.ru), contains 400 pieces of Holocaust revisionist writings and video clips.

Holocaust-denying books are also widely available at Russian book stores, the study said. In a related development, human rights and Jewish activists have called on federal authorities to designate Jan. 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in Russia.

### Bin Laden spared Mossad hit?

Israel tried to kill Osama bin Laden in 1996, an Israeli newspaper claimed.

Yediot Achronot reported Thursday that, five years before the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the United States, Mossad agents managed to recruit a woman who was close to the Saudi terrorist and ordered her to kill him. According to the report, the mission was aided by the confidante's home country — which was not identified — but the country ended its assistance because of Israeli-Palestinian tensions, and the mission had to be scrapped.

Danny Yatom, who was head of the Mossad at the time, declined to comment.

### Israeli films shown in Paris

An Israeli film festival opened in Paris. The sixth annual festival began Jan. 25 with the screening of "Ushpizin," a look at a fervently Orthodox couple in Jerusalem and the miracles they encounter while celebrating Sukkot, by director Gidi Dar.

Some 15 features and documentaries are being screened, including a tribute to director and satirist Ephraim Kishon, who died last year. The festival runs until Jan. 31.

### Backlash greets kosher food line in Belarus

A kosher bread line in a city in Belarus caused a string of anti-Semitic newspaper articles.

An editorial in the Mogilev Register, a local daily, warned those of the Russian Orthodox faith to keep away from kosher "products in the same way they keep away from idol sacrifice," claiming that the blood of sacrificed animals is used in kosher rituals.

It also claimed that the bakery's management, in its drive for profit, is turning the city into a Jewish community, the Russian AEN news agency reported.

An article in the Evening Mogilev, another daily, said the act of making something kosher is "sacrilegious and anti-Christian."

### Jewish leader pitches to Vatican

The chairman of the World Jewish Congress met with senior Vatican officials Thursday to discuss plans for a religious roundtable.

Rabbi Israel Singer is promoting a dialogue that he hopes will harness the power and influence of high-level moderate Muslim clergy.

The project would be based on the model of Jewish-Catholic dialogue, Singer said.

The Vatican officials "gave us the red carpet treatment as they have in recent times," Singer told JTA.

"They treated us like an ally and viewed this issue as being important to them as well as to us, and we will develop a common strategy," he said.