

IN THE NEWS

Palestinian prisoners surrender to Israelis

Six Palestinian prisoners surrendered to Israeli authorities after an Israeli raid on a Jericho prison.

At least two Palestinians were killed in shootouts during Tuesday's raid that transferred PFLP leader Ahmed Sa'adat and five of his comrades to Israeli custody. [Story, p. 3]

Senators press Bush on Saudis

A bipartisan slate of U.S. senators led by Jews from each party asked President Bush to urge Saudi Arabia to cancel a meeting on an Israel boycott.

Saudi Arabia is hosting an Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting this week, and a Saudi official reportedly said one session would be dedicated to reinforcing the Israel boycott — though Saudi Arabia vowed last year, when it joined the World Trade Organization, not to boycott Israel.

"Mr. President, the United States cannot remain silent on Saudi Arabia's intolerant boycott of Israel, and should insist that Saudi Arabia uphold its obligations as a member of WTO," said the letter initiated by Sens. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) and Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and signed by 15 others.

Olmert says bloc to remain in Israel

Ehud Olmert vowed that a major West Bank settlement bloc would remain part of Israel.

"The Ariel bloc will be an inseparable part of the State of Israel no matter what happens," Israel's interim prime minister said Tuesday during an inspection of the West Bank security fence route.

Ariel and surrounding communities form one of several West Bank settlement blocs that Olmert, the front-runner in Israel's March 28 elections, intends effectively to annex to the Jewish state.

Olmert wants to evacuate isolated settlements.

WORLD REPORT

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After experience of Holocaust, Jewish groups out front on Darfur

By DAVID J. SILVERMAN and RACHEL SILVERMAN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — One genocide nearly annihilated the Jewish people. Another has turned them into leading voices in the struggle against human cruelty.

The ongoing atrocities in Sudan, which have killed an estimated 300,000 black Muslims and left millions more homeless, have galvanized a community that knows the lessons of persecution all too well.

"We know what it means to be victims of those who want to wipe another people off the face of the earth," Rabbi Robert Levine, president of the New York Board of Rabbis, told roughly 150 rabbis Monday afternoon at a Darfur rally in New York City. "It was only two generations ago when we looked around and wondered, where was everyone?"

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, a representative of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, picked up the theme.

"The safe havens for the Darfur refugees are beginning to look more and more like the Warsaw Ghetto," Jacobs said, speaking in front of a Holocaust memorial around the corner from the United Nations. "If history is any indication, then the African murderers have nothing to fear."

But as the past few months have demonstrated, the Jewish community, at least, refuses to stand idly by. As activists across the country prepare for an April 30 Save Darfur rally in Washington, the call has become even more pronounced, prompting increased Jewish involvement and mobilization.

Much of the effort centers around the Save Darfur Coalition, a collection of 150 faith-based advocacy and humanitarian aid organizations, which was initiated in 2004 by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Jewish World Service.

The AJWS and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the umbrella body for Jewish community relations councils across the nation, are responsible for anchoring the Jewish response to the Darfur

crisis.

They're coordinating Jewish efforts in the "Million Voices for Darfur" campaign, an effort launched by Save Darfur to collect 1 million handwritten and electronic postcards calling on President Bush to support a stronger, multinational effort to protect Darfur residents.

The letters will be delivered to the White House on April 30, the day of the rally near the U.S. Capitol. Intense efforts are under way throughout the country to galvanize Jews for the rally, according to several activists.

Even before the protest, however, the Jewish community had rallied around Darfur.

Last month, Darfur topped the national Jewish agenda at an annual JCPA plenum, which sets national priorities for local community relations councils. This coveted spot is usually reserved for things like Israel, poverty or social service issues.

"The plenum made Darfur a national priority for the Jewish community," said Marlene Gorin, director of the Jewish Commu-

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *Slowly but surely, Jewish lobbying efforts on Darfur are yielding results*

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nity Relations Council of Greater Dallas and the Dallas Jewish Coalition to Save Darfur.

The topic also took center stage last month at a Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston meeting in Washington, when Nancy Kaufman, the organization's director, chaired a strategy meeting on Darfur of 40 JCRC directors.

On Sunday, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York devoted a day to the Sudanese crisis, bringing together Jewish and non-Jewish groups to discuss strategies to stop the genocide and bring relief to survivors. The afternoon lineup included a speech by a former Marine captain who previously served as the U.S. representative to the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Sudan.

Some note that the Jewish community's coordinated response has not been replicated by other religious movements.

Rev. Bruce Chilton, an Episcopal priest and director of the Institute of Advanced Theology at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., acknowledged that Darfur doesn't top many church agendas.

"I think the resources of compassion are still there," he said, but most Christians believe the only solution in Darfur would involve the military.

"The fatigue is, in my view, that we are spent where it concerns military intervention," he said. "Our will for that kind of action has been exhausted."

The road to Jewish involvement also has not been without stumbling blocks.

At the JCPA Washington conference, David Rubenstein, the Save Darfur coordinator, hinted at colliding agendas.

"Politically, it has been a real challenge to take other resources away without Americans expressing a commitment to the safety and security of people who are culturally and geographically so distant," he said.

Les Bronstein, a Reconstructionist rabbi at Bet Am Shalom in White Plains, N.Y., said galvanizing support has posed a struggle at the local level.

"I'm going to plead with my congregation not to be so insular," he said. "Not to worry so much about raising the building fund and the governance of the organization."

"But it's really hard," he added. "There's so many demands on the congregation."

Slowly but surely, Jewish lobbying efforts are yielding results.

The White House has labeled the killings a genocide, and Bush won plaudits from Jewish Darfur activists last month for requesting \$514 million as part of an emergency supplemental funding package.

He also called for a substantial increase in the number of international troops in the region and an expansion of

NATO's presence.

Rabbi Steve Gutow, JCPA's executive director, extolled the administration for "taking the lead" over all other nations on Darfur, even while the United States is bogged down with Iraq and rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina.

"We tend to love to criticize in this country," he said. "But this is a time for applause, especially in the last couple of weeks."

Others were less lavish in their praise of the president. AJWS President Ruth Messinger said the Bush administration went from "assiduously not talking about Darfur" to "saying that things needed to be done."

While welcoming the president's efforts as a "first step," she cautioned that his overtures smack of the "words, not action" approach she says she has seen in the past.

"Our united and decisive action will be the measure of us and will form the moral legacy we leave our children," Messinger told the audience in a featured speech at the JCPA plenum.

"At some point in our futures, those children or their children will ask what we did to stop the first genocide of the 21st century. Let's be sure we have an answer," she said.

(JTA Intern David J. Silverman contributed from Washington and staff writer Rachel Silverman from New York.)

'The safe havens for the Darfur refugees are beginning to look more and more like the Warsaw Ghetto. If history is any indication, then the African murderers have nothing to fear.'

Rabbi Rick Jacobs

Central Conference of American Rabbis

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Students vote in Israeli election

By JTA STAFF

NEW YORK (JTA) — College students from around the world will participate in a mock Israeli election.

Some 50,000 young people outside of Israel are expected to vote in the mock election to be held in advance of Israel's March 28 vote.

Upstart Activist, a Jerusalem-based

group, is organizing the mock vote, in conjunction with the Jewish National Fund's Caravan for Democracy, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, Hasbara Fellowship of Aish HaTorah, the Jewish Agency for Israel, World Union of Jewish Students and the Bureau of Jewish Education Rhode Island.

More information is available at www.israelvotes.com.

Serbian Jews don't cry for Milosevic's death

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA) — Jews in the former Yugoslavia shed few tears over the death of Slobodan Milosevic, the man most observers consider the main architect of the series of wars that convulsed the Balkans in the 1990s.

The former Serbian president had been on trial since 2001 for genocide and other war crimes at the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. He was found dead in his cell on Saturday, apparently the victim of a heart attack at age 64.

Journalist Aleksander Lebl, a longtime Jewish community leader in Belgrade, said the reaction of Serbia's 3,000 Jews, most of them highly integrated, secular and often intermarried, was similar to that of other citizens.

"Not as Jews but as citizens, most of them didn't like Milosevic's policies and actions, which caused the disintegration of Yugoslavia — a country most of them loved — wars and ethnic cleansing, a surge of nationalism, xenophobia, sanctions and economic collapse," Lebl told JTA.

Some Jews, in Serbia as well as elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, expressed frustration that Milosevic's sudden death had cheated justice, and some said they

feared his memory could now become a rallying point for extreme nationalists.

"He was not administered justice, he is going to be seen as a martyr by many Serbs," architectural historian Rudi Klein, who was born in Serbia and now teaches at universities in Budapest and Tel Aviv, told JTA.

"The Hague tribunal, on the

other hand, will be seen as a plot," he said. "It will give rise to conspiracy theories, which will put the blame on the West, particularly on the Americans — another regrettable fact."

Bosnian Jewish leader Jakob Finci agreed.

"From the Bosnian point of view, everyone is sorry that the verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was not delivered," he told JTA. "Now Milosevic will become a martyr, a real Serbian hero murdered by the West."

From the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis in the early 1990s, Jews in the former Yugoslav Federation were caught somewhere in the middle.

Their close-knit community was divided

when Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia broke away and became independent countries during a series of wars that left hundreds of thousands dead and displaced millions.

The wars also challenged the sense of identity and loyalty of local Jews, with those in Croatia and Serbia being pressed to support the actions — and ethnic feelings — of the respective nationalist forces.

Milosevic's brutal policies, meanwhile, isolated and economically ruined Serbia. Political repression, economic woes and the 1999 NATO bombing to halt Serbian attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo all contributed to a "brain drain" of young people. As many

as 300 to 400 younger Jews left Serbia for Israel, North America and elsewhere.

Throughout Milosevic's regime, individual Serbian Jews took personal political stands, with many opposing Milosevic. Official Jewish organizations made it a strict policy not to openly assume a political position, fearing reprisal and manipulation.

Jews did, however, openly join the street protests in 2000 that ousted Milosevic from power. ■

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Some Jews expressed frustration that Milosevic's sudden death had cheated justice.

Assassins' thwarted jailbreak turns into Palestinian violence

By DAN BARON

TEL AVIV (JTA) — It was billed as a quick mission to keep convicted killers behind bars, but it soon spun into a major Middle East crisis.

Prompted by reports that the Palestinian Authority planned to free a terrorist squad held in Jericho, Israeli security forces struck first Tuesday, blasting their way into the towering prison compound in the ancient West Bank town.

At least two Palestinians died in shootouts as commandos tried to reach the cells of PFLP chief Ahmed Sa'adat and his five comrades. The terrorists, jailed for assassinating Israel's tourism minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, in 2001 and for a thwarted attempt to ship arms to the Gaza Strip in 2002, vowed to fight to the death.

Israel, whose ground forces at Jericho were backed by air cover, was no less firm.

"They have a choice: Come out or die," a military source said.

The six surrendered to Israeli troops that evening, following heavy gunfire. Israeli officials said they would be transferred to Israeli jails.

It was not so much the televised images of the siege that in-

flamed emotions among Palestinians and in the wider Arab world, but what was absent: the American and British wardens assigned to monitor the prison. They had been withdrawn hours earlier, after warning last week that they would leave if the Palestinians did not keep longstanding promises to upgrade the wardens' security.

Britain and the United States were at pains to emphasize that the Jericho withdrawals were not synchronized with the Israeli raid, but some Arabs suggested a plot.

Israeli security sources said the foreign guards left Jericho earlier Tuesday after receiving warnings that they could come under attack from Palestinians intent on releasing the high-profile prisoners. The Israeli raid was ordered to prevent a jailbreak, the sources said.

Palestinian gunmen retaliated quickly.

They abducted nine foreigners in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and set fire to American- and British-owned buildings, including the British Council offices in Gaza.

The United States and European Union ordered their citizens out of the territories, and an E.U.-monitored crossing on Gaza's border with Egypt — a symbol of rapprochement hopes — was ordered briefly closed. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

UNICEF: Palestinian kids need aid

UNICEF said it needed \$6.2 million in emergency assistance for Palestinian children.

"The ongoing violence, as well as the impact of distressing events from the years of conflict, means children continue to be vulnerable," said the U.N. Children's Fund report, released Tuesday in Geneva.

It described a "sharp deterioration" in recent months and said one in 10 children in the Gaza Strip and West Bank under the age of five was malnourished to the point of stunted growth.

Israel, the United States and the European Union have pledged not to fund the Palestinian Authority as long as it is led by Hamas, the terrorist group that won a landslide election in January.

However, all parties have agreed to continue humanitarian funding to the Palestinians.

Ukrainian singer qualifies for song contest

A Jewish singer from Kiev will represent Ukraine at this year's Eurovision song contest. Tina Karol — the stage name of 23-year-old Tanya Liberman — defeated two other singers in the finals of Ukraine's Eurovision selection contest last Saturday in Kiev.

Karol is well-known in the Jewish community in Ukraine for her Jewish repertoire, and won several music contests organized by various Jewish groups in Ukraine.

The Eurovision contest will be held in May in Athens.

Latvian SS march canceled

A march commemorating Latvian soldiers who fought for the Nazis was canceled. A special commission of Latvia's Parliament canceled the rally by the Latvian SS Legion on Tuesday, two days before the event was to take place.

The commission cited security concerns, as the event has been drawing fierce criticism from anti-nationalist, pro-Russian groups vowing to protest the event.

Latvia's president, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, spoke out against the march, saying it brought unnecessary negative attention to Latvia.

Nationalist organizations vowed that they would go ahead with Thursday's event regardless of the cancellation.

Last spring, the event made international headlines when protesters violently clashed with marchers.

Controversial exhibit pulled in Germany

A Mexican artist will pull his installation that involves pumping auto exhaust into a former synagogue in Germany.

Santiago Sierra also said he will come to Germany from Mexico City to speak with his critics, and hopes to convince them to support his work.

Sierra's project drew widespread criticism from German Jews.

AJCommittee, Portugese group sign pact

The American Jewish Committee signed an association agreement with the umbrella body of Portugese Jewry.

The agreement between the AJCommittee and the Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa was signed this week. The agreement is the 18th such association the AJCommittee has established in recent years.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli lawmaker gets jail time

A lawmaker from Israel's Likud Party received a jail sentence in a corruption scandal.

Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court sentenced Naomi Blumenthal to eight

months behind bars Tuesday after finding her guilty of providing illicit perks to Likud supporters and then trying to cover up the infraction.

She also received a 10-month suspended sentence and was fined \$16,000. The court said it would put off implementing the sentence until after Israel's March 28 elections, in which Blumenthal is a Likud candidate.

She vowed to appeal.

Survey: Anti-Semitism widespread in Sweden

More than a quarter of Swedes harbor anti-Semitic views, a survey found.

According to the poll issued this week by the Crime Prevention Agency and Living History Forum, a Holocaust-awareness group, 26 percent of Swedes believe that "Jews have major influence on the global economy" and 15 percent believe that "Jews have too much influence on the world."

Around a third of the 3,000 respondents were described as having "ambivalent" attitudes on anti-Semitism, while 59 percent said they rejected prejudice against Jews.

Jewish groups in Sweden said the study shows that local anti-Semitism is a serious phenomenon that has been downplayed.

Peres meets with Abbas

Shimon Peres held secret talks with Mahmoud Abbas in Amman. Sunday's meeting, which was not advertised in advance, was described as dealing with economic issues.

Israel's interim prime minister, Ehud Olmert, has said he will shun Abbas due to Hamas' assumption of power in the Palestinian Authority. Peres, the No. 2 in Olmert's Kadima Party, said his meeting with the P.A. president did not violate Israeli policy because Hamas has yet to form the P.A. government.

At the meeting, Abbas expressed his opposition to the type of unilateral Israeli steps that Olmert is contemplating in the West Bank, Ha'aretz reported.

NORTH AMERICA

Falwell: Jews can't reach heaven

Jerry Falwell corrected the "misimpression" that he believes Jews may reach heaven without converting.

"While I am a strong supporter of the State of Israel and dearly love the Jewish people and believe them to be the chosen people of God, I continue to stand on the foundational biblical principle that all people — Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Jews, Muslims, etc. — must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enter heaven," the prominent evangelist said recently in a posting on the "Conservative Voice" Web site.

Falwell was referring to a Jerusalem Post story that claimed he had accepted "dual covenant" theology, which maintains that Jews have a separate covenant with God that allows them entrance to heaven.

"I simply cannot alter my belief that Jesus is the way to heaven, as he taught," Falwell said.

Reform Judaism boosted in FSU

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation is joining forces with the World Union for Progressive Judaism and Hebrew Union College to strengthen Reform Judaism in the former Soviet Union.

The foundation is "launching a strategic partnership" with the two Reform bodies, said a senior consultant for the Schusterman Foundation, Yonatan Gordis, who just returned from Moscow with the foundation's executive director, Sandy Cardin.