

IN THE NEWS
**Israel at ready
after Sinai blasts**

Israeli rescue workers in Eilat were on highest alert following explosions at a Sinai beach resort area.

Magen David Adom had 20 ambulances waiting at the Taba-Eilat border, prepared to evacuate any wounded Israelis, following three explosions in Dahab that killed at least 30 people and wounded scores.

At least three Israelis were wounded, the Jerusalem Post reported. Magen David and the Israel Defense Forces offered rescue and medical assistance to Egypt, but received no immediate response. Israel's Channel 10 reported that the IDF had closed the Taba crossing, preventing vehicles from entering Sinai, though a stream of Israeli vehicles was leaving Egypt.

**Anti-Semitism
down in 2005**

Incidents of violent anti-Semitism diminished around the world in 2005, an Israeli study found.

According to an annual report issued Monday by Tel Aviv University's Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism, there were dips in the number of serious attacks on Jews in Western Europe and North America last year, compared to 2004.

But the report noted that 2005 levels still were the second-highest in the last 15 years.

**Yoffie to address
Liberty University**

The leader of the Reform movement will deliver a speech at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, will deliver an address Wednesday to 9,000 students.

Yoffie's office said the invitation came as a "surprise" considering the Reform movement's differences with the religious right on issues such as abortion.

WORLD REPORT

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Israeli survivors and teenagers perform stories of the Holocaust

By DINA KRAFT

HADERA, Israel (JTA) — On stage, a spotlight focuses on a girl with thick, dark braids. She is asking her father what the word "war" means, but there's no time to explain.

Rinat Birger, 13, plays the role of Tsila Lieberman, a Holocaust survivor from Poland who escaped Auschwitz. Lieberman also sits on stage just a few feet behind Birger, watching the girl act out some of the most important scenes of Lieberman's life.

"I learned so much about what they went through," Birger said of her experience with Witness Theater, a yearlong program that brings together Holocaust survivors and teenagers in weekly meetings that culminate in a joint theater production.

Organizers say the idea is to merge drama therapy with Holocaust education in a way that benefits both sides. The survivors draw strength from having their stories heard; the students feel like they have stumbled into a whole new world.

It also makes the Holocaust more tangible to the teens.

"I went through a process and now I will never forget the Holocaust," said Omri Shamir, 13. "Every story I heard, I imagined I myself was living through."

Shamir portrayed Sarajevo-born Avi Albahari, who was separated from his mother at age 4. During and after the war, he lived as a Christian at nunneries and orphanages.

The Hadera group gave several performances at a city theater, prompting tears and standing ovations. The performances led up to Israel's Holocaust

Remembrance Day, which began Monday evening.

As survivors begin to die out, more thought is being put into how to document and pass on their memories in Israel.

"It became an inseparable part of us — these weekly gatherings where we connected to the people and their stories. The tears would pour down," said Violet Hadad, 14. "Before, these were only stories we heard on television, but now these stories were in front of us."

The project is the creation of Ezra and Idit Dagan, a husband-and-wife acting-and-directing team who believed that an intergenerational drama workshop would be one of the best ways for Israeli youth to make the stories of the Holocaust their own.

Ezra Dagan, a veteran Israeli stage actor, credits his role as a rabbi in Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List" with emboldening him to focus on the Holocaust.

While traditional Holocaust education, such as school assemblies on Yom Hashoah, has its place in Israel, "there needs to be new, active educational paths" as well, he said.

The Dagens have put together about 10 groups in the past six years that have included religious Jews, kibbutzniks and Ethiopian immigrants.

Originally they planned to work with children of survivors, but the survivors and their grandchildren's generation came together most easily, Dagan said.

The program is sponsored by Eshel, an organization founded and supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Commit-

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**YOM
HASHOAH
FEATURE**

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tee that works to improve the quality of life for Israel's elderly and boost their image in society. One of the projects of the theater group in Herzliya was sponsored by the UJA-Federation of New York.

In the theater production, the survivors take their places at round tables, as if at a cafe. They narrate events in their life as black-and-white photos of themselves before the war and scenes from the Holocaust flash behind them on a large screen.

The students act out the drama of the survivors' young lives — being shot at by soldiers, fleeing through forests, fighting with partisans and arriving at concentration and work camps in overcrowded trains.

Albahari sang Slavic songs from his childhood.

After immigrating to Israel and being abandoned at an orphanage by adopted parents, he found some peace as a teenager when he was brought to live on a kibbutz by a cousin, David Elazar, who went on to be-

come the chief of staff of the Israeli army.

"It was important for me to pass on the story," Albahari said. "There are many young people who have no idea what happened."

Shamir, the small-boned boy with large hazel eyes who portrayed Albahari, said the experience felt intensely personal.

"I really got into his character. I have to act through all these hard things he actually lived through," he said. "He gave me something I did not have before." ■

Proposal to amend Auschwitz's name gets mixed reaction

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Poland has long wanted its name not to be used in reference to concentration camps that existed on Polish soil during World War II.

Now Poland has made an official request to change Auschwitz's name — to mixed reviews.

The Polish government made the request last month to change the name of the site from "Auschwitz Death Camp" to "former Nazi German Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp." The request was submitted to UNESCO, the U.N. cultural organization since the site of the death camp is a U.N. cultural heritage site. UNESCO is expected to respond to the request by mid-2006.

The debate goes to the heart of the question of how Polish behavior during the Holocaust is remembered.

The name change is intended to stop the description of the camp by the international media, including The New York Times and

Der Spiegel, as a "Polish death camp," which offends Poles because the camp was run by Germany.

"In the years after the war, the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was definitively associated with the criminal activities of the national socialist Nazi regime in Germany. However, for the contemporary, younger generations, especially abroad, that association is not universal," Culture Ministry spokesman Jan Kasprzyk recently told journalists.

"The proposed change in the name leaves no doubt as to what the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp was."

Many Jewish groups and individuals, in Poland and around the world, are backing the call.

The Union of Religious Jewish Communities in Poland, representing the country's estimated 7,000-10,000 Jews, released a statement in support of the government's request.

Petr Kadlcik, the group's chairman, said "institutional and national responsibility for the Third Reich's policy" is not historically accurate, "but also becomes a present-day necessity" in the wake of constant newspaper referrals to Auschwitz as a Polish death camp. ■

Several Jewish organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League and Israel's Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, have recently backed the name change. So have others long involved in Jewish life.

Menachem Rosensaft, the founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, said that the Polish government's request is "absolutely legitimate."

Rosensaft added that "it makes no sense

to obfuscate valid concerns about historical and present-day Polish anti-Semitism by suggesting that Poles rather than Germans bear responsibility for the evil that was Auschwitz."

Poles long have complained that their victimization by the Nazis has been ignored.

The issue was complicated by the Polish dual role as martyrs — the Nazis labeled them "subhumans" — and as victimizers, because some of them were involved in anti-Semitic acts during and after World War II.

But Dr. Maram Stern, deputy secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, accused Poland of trying to rewrite history with the proposed change.

Stern also says that although the camp was built by Germany, everybody in the region knew about its existence, and workers were recruited from neighboring Polish villages.

This latter claim has been opposed by the Polish government.

Stern's comments are "totally absurd," and stem from "complete ignorance," said Karoslaw Mensfeld, a spokesman for the State Museum of Auschwitz.

Israel Gutman, Yad Vashem's chief historian, said "the phrase 'site of the mass murder of Jews' be inserted into the camp's name," he wrote in a column for Poland's Dziennik newspaper last Friday.

Gutman's proposal was attacked by the Polish historian Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a former Auschwitz prisoner, for not including the Gypsies, Soviet prisoners and Polish Christians who were murdered in Auschwitz, a fact he said no single name could possibly convey. ■

Poland wants
Auschwitz renamed
to reflect Germany's
responsibility.

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For Peretz, Defense Ministry will be trial by fire

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In the run-up to Israel's election, Labor Party leader Amir Peretz promised a "social agenda" that would help the nation's poor and weak. In coalition negotiations after the elections, he demanded the Finance Ministry as a base for social change.

In the end, Peretz accepted the defense portfolio, and critics both in and outside Labor are asking whether that means Peretz has given up on the drive for social reform that helped him win 19 Knesset seats at the ballot box.

Other critics ask a different question: Is Peretz, a civilian with no experience in government, the right man to be entrusted with the nation's defense with a new wave of Palestinian terrorism expected, Iran's leader threatening Israel with nuclear destruction and a major West Bank withdrawal in the offing?

Peretz's social agenda focused on four main issues: raising the minimum wage from around \$730 to \$1,000 per month, improving pensions, subsidizing more medicines and spending more on education.

Despite all the sound and fury of the campaign, however, Labor ended up without any social ministries except education.

Critics say the health, welfare, housing and immigrant absorption portfolios were never remotely in Labor's sights during more than two weeks of coalition negotiations with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima Party. They claim this shows that Peretz is not really serious about social change, and that Labor's social agenda is doomed.

Peretz's supporters in Labor argue that social policy is a matter of collective government decision, not a question of who controls a given ministry. They maintain that most of Labor's social agenda has been written into government guidelines and that the new administration will therefore be obliged to carry it out.

For example, the minimum wage will be raised in installments, starting with a \$110 raise in June and reaching the full \$1,000 a month by the end of the government's term in 2010.

Peretz confidants also suggest that as defense minister he will be able to initiate cuts in the \$8-billion-a-year defense bud-

get, freeing up funds that can be diverted to social projects.

The Israeli media largely has been skeptical. Analysts doubt whether Peretz, a former trade union boss, will be able to slash defense spending, most of which goes to salaries.

"The claim that Peretz will take the ultimate social role by cutting defense budgets and redirecting funds to social causes is nonsense at best," social affairs reporter Ruth Sinai wrote in Ha'aretz. "Does anyone actually believe he will lift a finger against defense contractors with their strong labor unions? Is there a chance the former Histadrut labor federation chair will take measures that will result in hundreds or thousands of career army layoffs?"

It's not just Peretz's credibility on social issues that will be under scrutiny; so, too, will his ability to handle national security.

From Day One, Peretz will have to contend with a plethora of complex defense issues: how to deal with Palestinian terrorism under a radical, Hamas-led Palestinian Authority that refuses to condemn attacks; how to prepare for the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear program, which is led by a regime that talks about wiping Israel off the map; how to accelerate completion of Israel's West Bank security fence, delayed in part by bureaucratic bottlenecks in the Defense Ministry itself; and how to facilitate a major West Bank evacuation with minimal friction between the army and evacuated settlers.

One of the first documents to land on Peretz's desk will be a major review of Israel's defense doctrine carried out over the past 18 months, which identifies non-conventional nuclear threats and sub-conventional terrorist threats as more urgent than the traditional threat of conventional warfare.

Peretz will have to decide how to translate this into military spending, reshaping the structure of Israel's armed forces and, in general, reordering security priorities. For example, does this mean Israel can cut back on armored forces, while spending more on special counter-

terrorist units and air power?

Besides these tough calls, Peretz will have to decide whether to continue building up an independent strategic branch in the ministry — which the Israel Defense Force strongly opposes — and how to go about rationalizing Israel's cash-leaking military industries.

As a civilian who only reached the rank of captain during his military service, Peretz also will have a tough time gaining the confidence of the generals and ex-generals who people the defense establishment. Indeed, some analysts say Peretz is in a no-win situation and is bound to fail, while others maintain that he has a great chance to show that he has what it takes to make a national leader.

Some consider it an advantage that Peretz comes to the defense establishment without a long military resume.

"An appointment of this kind can stir fresh security thinking and

eradicate the personal considerations that exist when the defense minister comes from one of the cliques inside the army," military analyst Amir Rapaport wrote in the Ma'ariv daily.

Peretz also will be able to use his position as the minister responsible for contact with the Palestinian territories to keep an open channel to P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, while maintaining Israel's boycott of the Hamas-led P.A. government.

Peretz believes that only if contacts with Abbas fail to yield progress toward an agreement should Israel move for unilateral withdrawal. The defense portfolio will give him full scope to test that thesis.

By taking on defense, Peretz has roused critics in the Labor Party and outside. The insiders accuse of him of abandoning the social agenda out of a lust for power; on the outside, critics like the Likud's Yuval Steinitz, who favors a civilian defense minister, nevertheless argue that Peretz is the wrong man for the job.

The onus of proof clearly is on Peretz. He will have to show that he can handle the defense portfolio, and, at the same time, push through important social reforms. Otherwise, his future as a national leader could be in jeopardy.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Analysts question whether the former union boss will cut jobs.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli security overhaul seen

Israel was advised to redesign its defenses to deal with non-conventional threats.

The Committee for Israeli Security Doctrine, formed two years ago by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, submitted its recommendations this week.

According to the panel, Israel faces a diminished threat of conflict with conventional armies, but this has been offset by the risks of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction sought by countries like Iran.

Mofaz endorsed the committee's findings and said he would initiate an appropriate overhaul of the Israeli military and civilian security services.

The task of implementation likely will be up to Labor Party leader Amir Peretz, who is expected to take over the Defense Ministry in the next government.

Abbas to Hamas: Deal with Israel

Mahmoud Abbas said he had the power to remove the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority if it doesn't begin to negotiate with Israel. "Hamas has to face the facts and establish communication with Israel," the Palestinian Authority president told Turkish CNN on Monday.

"I'm worried that the situation will turn into a tragedy in the near future. A short time later we could be up against a great hunger disaster in Palestine."

Abbas also said peace with Israel could be reached soon. "It is possible to reach a very fair solution.

If terrorism is isolated, it is possible to reach peace in less than one year," he said.

Though he never fulfilled his obligations under the "road map" peace plan to dismantle Palestinian terrorist groups, Abbas said the plan could still be revived. He also warned Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert against moving ahead with his plan to annex major West Bank settlement blocs in the absence of peace talks. "If Israel moves on its own and imposes a solution, there will be a settlement for five or 10 years but then the cycle of violence will resume," Abbas said.

Gaza gunman killed

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian gunman who fired on them from the Gaza Strip. There were no Israeli casualties from Monday's ambush on an army patrol near Kissufim on Gaza's border.

Troops backed by a tank returned fire, killing the gunman. It was not immediately clear which Palestinian group was responsible for the attack. In the West Bank, Israeli forces arrested 13 suspected Palestinian terrorists in overnight sweeps.

Mofaz likens Iran to Hitler

Iran's nuclear program is the worst threat Jews have faced since the Holocaust, Israel's defense minister said. "The world must not wait. It must do everything necessary on a diplomatic level in order to stop its nuclear activity," Mofaz said Monday in an address to an Iran conference at Tel Aviv University.

"We have not faced such a threat since Hitler," he said. Israel backs U.S.-led efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program through U.N. sanctions, but has not ruled out military action as a last resort.

Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has called for Israel's elimination, said Monday that he considered sanctions very unlikely.

Study: Survivors at increased cancer risk

Holocaust survivors in Israel have a higher death rate from cancer than contemporaries who moved to Israel before World War II, a new study found.

According to a University of Haifa study, the younger a survivor was during the war, the higher the risk that he or she will develop cancer; and cancer survival rates are lower among survivors than among those who didn't go through the Holocaust.

The study looked at data on some 2 million Israelis of European origin. Dr. Micah Bracha, director of the National Cancer Registry in Israel's Health Ministry and a senior lecturer at Haifa University's School of Public Health, said that "the difficult conditions," of the ghettos and concentration camps, especially lack of food "are likely to be among the main causes of the findings."

Researchers recommended greater efforts to increase cancer awareness among survivors.

WORLD

Teens make March of Living

Some 8,000 Jewish teenagers from around the world will take part in Tuesday's March of the Living at the site of Auschwitz in Poland.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, whose family came from Poland and who lost relatives in the Holocaust, will join the march.

The March of the Living is an annual event in memory of the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

The participants march from Auschwitz to Birkenau, where the crematoriums helped exterminate more than 1.1 million Jews. The event symbolizes the death marches when the Nazis began emptying the camp and forcing prisoners to walk hundreds of miles in freezing weather with little food.

Czechs host Holocaust education meeting

The education ministers of 50 European countries gathered for a two-day seminar on the Holocaust.

The Council of Europe seminar, which opened Monday, is being held at the Terezin (Theresienstadt) museum and memorial on the grounds of the former concentration camp in the Czech Republic.

Czech Education Minister Petra Buzkova told attendees that teachers should help students see the connections between Nazism and the activities of some skinhead groups today.

"I don't think one should consider hooliganism by young frustrated radicals the same as Nazi crimes, but one definitely should point out a number of identical qualities, and similar tendencies and dangers that may be hidden in extreme actions that seem to be mere hooliganism," she said.

The seminar aims to identify best practices for Holocaust education.

The keynote speech will be given Tuesday by former Czech President Vaclav Havel, who played a key role in setting up Holocaust education in the Czech Republic in the late 1990s.

Czechs to mark Yom HaShoah

Holocaust Remembrance Day will be marked this year in Prague for the first time in an open public space.

The open venue for the April 25 ceremony was chosen by the Terezin (Theresienstadt) Initiative Institute so that it speaks to the entire public.

The names of 80,000 Holocaust victims from Czech lands — 89 percent of Czechoslovakia's Jewish population at the time — will be read at the ceremony, and some of their photographs will be shown.