

IN THE NEWS

Nasrallah: Serious swap talks under way

Hezbollah's leader said "serious negotiations" were under way for the return of two Israeli soldiers the group kidnapped in July. Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said Tuesday that the U.N.-appointed negotiator was shuttling proposals between Hezbollah and Israeli officials.

The terrorist group has demanded the release of hundreds of security prisoners in exchange for Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. The remarks came shortly after Ma'ariv quoted diplomatic sources as saying the Red Cross was pessimistic about whether Regev and Goldwasser, abducted in a July 12 cross-border raid, could be recovered soon.

Israeli forces hit north Gaza

Seven Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed during fierce fighting in the northern Gaza Strip.

Hundreds of soldiers backed by tanks and helicopters stormed the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun on Wednesday in a major operation against Palestinian rocket crews.

Seven Palestinians, most of them combatants, were killed. A 21-year-old Israeli soldier died from Palestinian fire.

'Winning' Holocaust cartoon chosen

A Moroccan won a Holocaust cartoon contest sponsored by the Iranian government. Abdellah Derkaoui took the \$12,000 first prize Wednesday in the contest launched by the official Iranian newspaper Hamshari that stirred international controversy.

Iran called the contest a response to Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that angered Muslims worldwide last year. Derkaoui's cartoon shows a wall, with a gate resembling the entrance to the Auschwitz death camp, separating the Al-Aksa Mosque from the rest of Jerusalem.

WORLD REPORT

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Controversial flag resurfaces in Hungarian protests, politics

By MICHAEL J. JORDAN

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Amid street protests that turned violent around the 50th anniversary of Hungary's famous anti-Soviet uprising, one visual has struck Hungarian Jews: the growing ubiquity of the country's centuries-old Arpad flag.

The red-and-white striped flag may best capture the aggressive mood of Hungarian politics today.

With roots tracing back more than 800 years to a medieval dynasty, the flag was expropriated by the notorious Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, whose Nazi-installed puppet regime in late 1944 began murdering thousands of Budapest Jews, many of whom were shot and dumped into the Danube River.

"Many Jews know it's a historic flag, and if they're going to bring 100 different flags from the Middle Ages, including the Arpad flag, no one's going to be disturbed," says Peter Feldmajer, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Hungary. "But if they only bring the Arpad flag, that symbolizes that they're the inheritors of the Arrow Cross movement. It's a symbol of murder and mass murder."

There is a crucial difference: The Arrow Cross emblazoned its black or green emblem on the Arpad flag, while today's demonstrators wave the red-and-white stripes free of any Arrow Cross insignia — if for no other reason, because the Arrow Cross logo is now illegal.

The Communist regime, which seized power in 1948-49, banned the Arrow Cross

symbol and the flag itself. Four decades later, after communism collapsed, newly democratic Hungary banned the Arrow Cross emblem, plus other symbols of totalitarianism like the Nazi swastika and Communist red star. But the Arpad flag itself remains legal and is one of many official flags in the Hungarian Parliament.

Shorn of the Arrow Cross, it's impossible to know exactly what the flag-wavers mean, or if they comprehend the crimes committed under the flag against fellow Hungarians six decades ago.

But for critics of the right-wing, the flag-wavers "are a soft target, because how do you prove you're not a fascist?" says Sebestyen Gorka, executive director of the Institute for Transitional Democracy and International Security, a conservative think tank in Budapest. "If you say eight centuries of history can be eradicated by 18 months of fascist distortion of symbols, you're losing historic perspective."

Which raises the question: What's in a flag?

Similar controversies have dogged the swastika — a three-millennia-old symbol for good luck before it was embraced by the Nazis — while the Confederate flag in the United States represents the Old South to some, slavery to many others.

In a more direct parallel to Hungary, Croatia stirred anxiety in the early 1990s when freedom from the former Yugoslavia led to reintroduction of the ancient Croat red-and-white checkerboard flag. The Holocaust-era Ustashe movement had co-

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THE JEWISH
WORLD

■ *The Arpad flag was used by the Nazi puppet regime in Hungary during World War II*

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opted the flag, superimposed a "U," then deported thousands of Serbs and Jews under it to the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Like defenders of the Arpad flag today, Croats argued that a relative blip in history, however bloody, should not irreparably stain a long-standing symbol of nationhood.

But the Arpad flag's potential double-meaning doesn't mean there will soon be anti-Semitic pogroms, one Jewish observer says — although some Jews noted a newspaper report that some protesters were headed for the famed Dohany Synagogue before police turned them away.

"It's understandable that it's very frightening for Jews, but I don't think the people who use it are necessarily Arrow Cross supporters," says Andras Kovacs, director of the Jewish Studies Project at Central European University in Budapest. "They see it as a symbol of a tendency they would like to display: the traditional Hungarian extreme right."

Observers say that may also explain why Fidesz, the mainstream right-wing party, doesn't distance itself from the Arpad flag-wavers.

Fidesz's leader, former Prime Minister Viktor Orban, long has been accused of overtures to the far right, beginning with his ascent to the premiership in 1998. Later, he was accused of remaining silent as anti-Jewish incidents mounted.

Orban and Fidesz were voted out in 2002. But two far-right parties have

since disintegrated, so Fidesz today leads a vast right wing, encompassing all stripes.

The movement has been buoyed by the audio-taped, obscenity-laced admission by current Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany that he lied to voters "morning, evening and night" about the country's economic health in order to get re-elected earlier this year.

Mass protests turned violent Sept. 18, as several hundred far-right extremists and soccer hooligans clashed with police for three nights.

Gyurcsany refuses to resign, while Orban is accused of inciting the masses.

Prior to local elections, Orban reportedly said a sweeping Fidesz victory — which happened Oct. 1 — would legitimize an "assault against the government." More recently, he has branded the Socialist-led government "illegitimate."

With the Arpad flag now a regular fixture at Fidesz public events, interspersed with the traditional Hungarian tricolor of red, white and green bars, even some non-Jews — including a leading liberal politician — suggest a link between flag and party.

For its part, Fidesz officials say the party's Socialist and liberal foes are playing politics.

"Those critics who are making the Arpad flag an issue want to distract attention from the real questions that need to be addressed, such as why Hungary is in a moral and financial crisis after six years of Socialist-liberal rule, who caused it, and why can a prime minister who confessed that he lied for years and did nothing that could be called governing for four years still be in power," Andras Cser-Palkovics, a Fidesz spokesman, wrote to JTA.

Cser-Palkovics declined to answer questions about whether the party encourages or discourages use of the flag, or if its silence on the issue

effectively condones it.

In contrast, the Jewish community's Feldmajer says the leader of the small, conservative Christian Democratic party assured him last week that he will bar members from waving the Arpad flag at future party gatherings.

Yet the issue remains relevant — for the sake of democracy, one analyst says.

"Those who wave Arpad flags see Fidesz as a much more credible party than the Socialists, which is seen as absolutely illegitimate, so Fidesz has a responsibility to make clear what is an acceptable right-wing agenda in a democratic society and what is not," says Balazs Aron Kovacs, program officer for Freedom House in Budapest. "I hope Fidesz will speak out — sooner rather than later." ■

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Jerusalem churches call for barrier talks

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jerusalem churches called for the formation of a committee to consider access to holy sites in the wake of Israel's West Bank security barrier.

"With the construction of the wall many of our faithful are excluded from the precincts of the holy city, and according to plans published in the local press, many more will also be excluded in the future," said the statement signed by the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and other Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic

leaders. "Surrounded by walls, Jerusalem is no longer at the center and is no longer the heart of life as she should be."

It called for as "soon as possible, an ad hoc committee to reflect on the future of the city. In this committee the local churches of Jerusalem must be a part." Israel's West Bank security barrier has drastically reduced terrorist attacks. The statement was distributed this week in the United States by Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of dovish mainstream churches. ■

The changing notion of kosher

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Reform rabbis are talking about their own board of kashrut. Alternative minyans are offering vegetarian or kosher-approved vegetarian meal options. Synagogues are contracting with organic farms in the name of Jewish values.

Something is going on in the world of Jewish dietary practice. But is it kosher?

That depends on what you mean by the word. In addition to following more kosher laws, many Jews are expanding their notion of what constitutes food that is “fit to eat.”

Even as the kosher food industry continues its explosive growth — it’s now a \$10 billion market, showing 15 percent growth over last year, according to Lubicom Marketing, which runs Manhattan’s annual Kosherfest — some individuals and groups are exploring creative approaches to kashrut in the name of pluralism, holiness and social justice.

Eco-kashrut, which includes notions of sustainable agriculture, fair labor practices and ethical treatment of animals in its definition of what is kosher, or fit to eat, has been a staple of Jewish Renewal since Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi began promoting the term decades ago.

As environmentalism itself entered the American mainstream, eco-kashrut gained currency in more Jewish circles.

Tu B’Shevat, which marks the new growing season, is commonly observed by such activities as tree plantings, beach or park clean-ups and recycling projects. Jewish schools and camps promote recycling in the dining hall as a Jewish value.

The “green synagogue” movement, which encourages congregations to build and maintain their shuls according to sound ecological practices, is based on the same notion, that Jews can find support for contemporary sensibilities within Jewish tradition.

Now a handful of Jewish groups are poised to take eco-kashrut to the next step, creating a symbiotic food-production chain whereby synagogues and other Jewish institutions buy their food from local organic farms.

Hazon, a New York-based nonprofit, pioneered the idea two summers ago with its Tuv Ha’aretz program. This growing season, five synagogues and Jewish community centers in New York, New Jersey, Washington and Texas contracted with local farmers for all or a significant part of their harvest, giving the farmers financial support while encouraging their own members to eat locally grown,

organic produce. Five more cities will be added to the program next year.

“We want to reframe the question of kashrut, not to abandon it, but to ask what it means to keep kosher in the 21st century,” project coordinator Leah Koenig says. “Is it kosher to eat food sprayed with chemicals? Is it kosher to eat eggs from chickens kept in tiny, cramped cages?”

The project is the perhaps first Jewish entree into the world of CSA, or community-sustained agriculture. Synagogue or JCC members pay in advance for produce boxes, which they pick up at the institution on a weekly basis.

“It’s pretty radical,” Koenig says. “The synagogue becomes not just a place to pray or drop off your children, but where you pick up your organic produce. It gives people the opportunity to see the synagogue in a new way.”

Next spring, a new organic farm just outside Baltimore will begin growing produce for a conference center owned by the Baltimore Jewish federation.

The 1.5-acre Pearlstone Farm is projected as “a model for small family farms trying to stay in business,” says director Yaqir Manela, 24.

The greenhouse will go up in November and the first crops will be planted in early February, for Tu B’Shevat. Manela hopes to expand the farm to seven or eight acres, and eventually partner with different Jewish institutions.

There has been “a groundswell of energy” these past two years in the field of eco-kashrut, Manela says.

“People realize it’s a way of sup-

porting Israel and ourselves, to not be energy-dependent. The halachah is right there: Don’t reap the corners of your field, share your harvest. In Judaism you create social justice by the way you take care of the earth. This is kashrut in a big way.”

Not everyone is buying in, however.

“The Orthodox Union has had this discussion, in terms of animal welfare and healthful foods,” but ultimately decided that its mandate is simply to provide certification of what’s kosher according to halachah, not decide what’s “healthy” or “ethical” food, says Rabbi Menachem Genack, head of the organization’s kashrut division.

Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Conservative Movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary, agrees.

“As a Jew who believes kashrut is part of the discipline of Judaism, kashrut is

kashrut. Eco-kashrut is something different,” Wertheimer says. “Not that I’m opposed to eco-kashrut, but it’s something else.”

Still, America’s obsession with food and global cuisine, combined with growing pride in ethnic differences, has given rise to increased sensitivity toward people who restrict their diets for religious, ethical or health-related reasons. It’s acceptable when dining out, or in another’s home, to say, “I can’t eat meat,” “I’m vegan” or “I’m kosher.”

Jewish events have been offering a fish or vegetarian meal option for years. But as increasing numbers of young, politically active Jews, in particular, subscribe to one or more of these eating restrictions, some Jewish groups are going further: It’s not enough, they say, to offer only kosher food or only vegetarian food, because that disenfranchises people who don’t follow those dietary practices.

Several of the new alternative minyans, including Manhattan’s Kol Zimrah and Tikken Leil Shabbat in Washington, use what they call the “two-table” system at communal meals: one for vegetarian food and one for vegetarian food with a hechsher, or kosher certification.

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

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NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

'Quartet' to meet with moderate Arabs

The "Quartet" of major powers guiding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will meet Dec. 1 in Jordan with moderate Arab states.

The Jordan Times quoted senior Jordanian officials as saying late Tuesday that representatives of the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia would meet at a Jordanian Dead Sea resort with foreign ministers from Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

U.S.: Syria, Iran want to topple Siniora

The United States accused Syria, Iran and Hezbollah of plotting to topple Lebanon's government.

"Support for a sovereign, democratic in Jordan Dec. 1 and prosperous Lebanon is a key element of U.S. policy in the Middle East," a White House statement said Wednesday. "We are therefore increasingly concerned by mounting evidence that the Syrian and Iranian governments, Hezbollah and their Lebanese allies are preparing plans to topple Lebanon's democratically-elected government" led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

The statement suggested such an attempt would come about through "manufactured demonstrations and violence, or by physically threatening its leaders."

Syria already is trying to block the trial of the alleged plotters of the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister who opposed Syria's occupation of Lebanon, the statement said.

Hezbollah demands new government

Hezbollah is demanding a new government in Lebanon.

The militant group threatened to force early elections with street protests and the resignation of its two Cabinet ministers if its demands are not met.

The group, which is backed by Syria and Iran, is demanding a new "national unity" Cabinet in which the militants and their allies would hold veto power over key decisions.

Hezbollah has been demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora since the terrorist group sparked a 34-day war with Israel this summer that left much of Lebanon in ruins.

The threatened street protests could turn violent if pro-government demonstrators confront Hezbollah marchers.

Brits urge Syria to press Hamas

Top British officials traveled to Damascus to urge Syria to influence Hamas into moderating its views.

Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Prime Minister Tony Blair's top foreign policy adviser, led the secret delegation to Monday's meeting with President Bashar Assad, according to British press accounts published Wednesday.

The diplomats urged Syria to accommodate Western positions on Israel, Lebanon and Iraq in exchange for an easing of its isolation.

On Israel, the British delegation said Syria should press Hamas into recognizing Israel and renouncing terrorism, the conditions set down by the international community after the terrorist group won Palestinian Authority elections earlier this year.

It also asked Assad to use his influence to free Cpl. Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier kidnapped by Hamas-affiliated gunmen June 25.

Assad permits Hamas' leadership to use Damascus as its headquarters.

Olmert low in Kadima poll

Two members of Ehud Olmert's Kadima Party are more popular than the Israeli prime minister, a voter survey found.

The poll, published Wednesday to mark a year since former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon formed Kadima, found that just 16 percent of party voters back Olmert as leader. The incumbent was beaten by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who had 25 percent of support, and Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz with 17 percent.

Egypt rejects force offer

Egypt reportedly rejected a proposal for a U.S.-led multinational force to police the Egypt-Gaza Strip border.

The offer arose this week during meetings between John Negroponte, the U.S. intelligence chief, and his Egyptian counterpart, Omar Suleiman, Ha'aretz reported Wednesday.

Hamas launches hudna campaign

Hamas launched a campaign to persuade the West to accept its offer of a hudna, or 10-year cease-fire.

"This offer of hudna is no ruse, as some assert, to strengthen our military machine, to buy time to organize better or to consolidate our hold on the Palestinian Authority," Ahmed Yousef, a senior adviser to P.A. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh wrote Wednesday in an Op-Ed in the New York Times. He made the same case in Britain Wednesday.

Pressing Hamas to renounce terrorism and recognize Israel would be counterproductive, Yousef said, while a hudna would provide time to explore those possibilities.

Chechnya parallel draws fire

A right-wing Israeli Cabinet minister was criticized for suggesting that the army fight Palestinian terrorists by adopting Russia's tactics in Chechnya.

Israel Radio on Wednesday quoted Avigdor Lieberman, the new minister for strategic threats, as telling fellow Cabinet members that Israeli forces fighting in Gaza should "adopt the Russian model in Chechnya."

Tens of thousands of civilians in the breakaway Russian republic were killed during a more than decade-old insurgency.

P.A. 60 percent poorer under Hamas

The Palestinian Authority's funding has dropped by 60 percent since Hamas took power in March, according to a new report.

The International Monetary Fund released the information Wednesday, adding that the P.A. government payroll has increased. Between April and September, the Palestinian Authority took in \$500 million, down from more than \$1.2 billion during the same period the previous year.

WORLD

Moscow nationalist march banned

Jewish leaders in Russia praised authorities for banning a street march that several ultranationalist groups planned for this weekend in Moscow.

"Moscow is a multi-ethnic and a multifaith city. If different ethnic and religious communities do not live peacefully together, unrest is guaranteed in the city and in the whole country," Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, said Wednesday in response to the city's decision to ban the so-called Russian March planned for Saturday.

St. Petersburg also banned a similar event slated for the Nov. 4 Unity Day, a national holiday in Russia. Moscow came under fierce criticism last year after it allowed thousands of nationalists to march downtown on Unity Day.

Many sported Nazi insignia and yelled "Heil Hitler." Organizers of this year's march were not discouraged by the ban and said they would go ahead.