

IN THE NEWS

Olmert rebuffs Syrian overtures

Ehud Olmert brushed off Syria's recent peace overtures toward Israel as insincere. Asked Wednesday about recent messages that Damascus would enter peace negotiations without preconditions, dropping its usual demand that Israel commit in advance to returning the Golan Heights, the Israeli prime minister called for action as well as words.

"There's no disputing the State of Israel's desire to make peace," he told reporters. However, he said, Syria must stop interfering in Lebanon and supporting terrorism.

Court springs Irving

Holocaust denier David Irving won an appeal against his imprisonment in Austria. A Vienna court on Wednesday found in favor of an appeal filed by the British historian, who was arrested during a November 2005 visit to Austria and sentenced to three years in prison for denying that Nazi Germany had carried out an organized genocide against European Jewry.

The court agreed to reduce Irving's sentence and admonished him to leave Austria at the earliest opportunity. The judge who freed Irving reportedly has close ties to a far-right Austrian party.

No death penalty in Seattle shooting

A Washington State prosecutor will not seek the death penalty against a man accused of attacking the Seattle Jewish federation.

King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng said he won't seek the death penalty against Naveed Haq, who is accused of shooting six women at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle on July 28, killing one and wounding five. Haq, 31, was to face a formal hearing Wednesday afternoon. Maleng cited Haq's history of mental illness in his decision.



WORLD REPORT

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

Jewish Agency, Hillel partnering for college-age Jews in the FSU

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — In an effort to end overlap between the two groups, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and the Jewish Agency are joining forces to form one combined organization serving college-age Jews in the former Soviet Union.

The new arrangement also will allow Hillel to move onto college campuses, where it can reach out to unaffiliated Jewish students.

Moscow, which has seen diminishing numbers participating in Hillel and Jewish Agency activities, will be one of the five cities in the pilot program when it begins in January. The other four cities have yet to be determined.

After an 18-month pilot, the partnership will be extended to the rest of the former Soviet Union.

Hillel leaders say the same young Jews now tend to frequent both Hillel and Jewish Agency activities.

"We have students bouncing around between the two organizations," said Aaron Goldberg, director of Hillel's international division. "We thought we should bring them together, with the money funneled through

Hillel, and together we'll create a larger organization with greater outreach and more professionals."

The deal, sealed Dec. 10, will double Hillel's budget for the region to \$2.7 million by 2008. Hillel's current budget of \$1.5 million for its 27 clubs in the former Soviet Union has not changed in five years despite rising costs.

Hillel will remain in charge of operations and programmatic decisions. The Jewish Agency

will cease its separate college-age activities and send its madrichim, or Israeli youth counselors, to serve the Hillel clubs.

The two groups' summer camps in the region also will be combined starting in 2007. All branches will report to Hillel's new Russia director, a position yet to be filled.

The relationship involves three other partners besides the Jewish Agency and Hillel. They are the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, which have been working together in the former Soviet Union for more than a decade, and the Chais Family Foundation.

All but Hillel will provide \$500,000 each for 2007, with Hillel giving \$400,000. Those figures will shift to \$600,000 and \$300,000 by '08.

The budget increase will enable Hillel to focus more on professional development for its local staff, including raising salaries to encourage more young Jews to go into the field.

"We need to make sure that we compensate them, so we don't lose this young passion and energy," Goldberg said.

Unlike North America, where Hillel is primarily a campus-based organization, Hillel clubs in the former Soviet Union are off campus and open to young Jews up to the age of 30, whether or not they are students.

Bringing the Jewish Agency into the partnership confirms the agency's shift in focus in the former Soviet Union from aliyah, or immigration to Israel, to recognizing that most Jews in the former Soviet Union will remain there.

Thus the agency's role will become, as it is in other diaspora communities, to ensure

Continued on page 2

■ Hillel clubs in the FSU are open to young Jews up to the age of 30

Continued from page 1

that Israel remains a central element in post-Soviet Jewish programming, said Alan Hoffman, director general of the Jewish Agency's education division.

That task is easier in the post-Soviet nations, he points out, because of strong ethnic loyalties that already exist, as well as the fact that most Jews there have close relatives living in Israel.

Hoffman called the formal cooperation by the organizations "historic" for the region, although it is modeled on how Hillel works in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

Avraham Infeld, former president of Hillel International, was instrumental in brokering the partnership and will chair its steering committee during the pilot period.

He said the increased funding will allow Hillel to address the particular challenge of Moscow, with some 25,000 Jewish students.

Talking about the dwindling numbers from the Russian capital participating in Hillel and Jewish Agency activities, Infeld said, "It's a very cosmopolitan city, there's so much competing for students' time. We have to work differently there."

Cooperating more closely with the Jewish Agency is a second priority, he said, that will enable Hillel programs to focus more effectively on Israel.

Infeld said he hopes to restore some funding to the birthright Israel program, which cut back last year on the number of students it took to the Jewish state

from the former Soviet Union, and keep the returnees from birthright and other Israel programs involved in the Jewish community.

Chabad also offers programs for college-age students in the former Soviet Union that often compete directly with Hillel.

Unlike North America, where Chabad campus programs are tacitly open to anyone who identifies Jewishly, Chabad in the former Soviet Union is

focused on those who are Jewish according to halacha, or Jewish law — that is, born of a Jewish mother. Conversion is virtually unknown in the region. Hil-

lel welcomes anyone who identifies as Jewish.

The unintended result is that in some cities, young people with Jewish mothers gravitate to Chabad, while those with non-Jewish mothers go to Hillel.

Infeld said Hillel will work "very hard" to change that, but as long as Chabad in the former Soviet Union continues to work only with halachic Jews, and requires that its staff be observant, he does

not envision real cooperation.

"We have not yet built a relationship," he said, "and I don't see how it's going to work." ■



Germany mulls ban on extremist party

BERLIN (JTA) — Three years after an aborted attempt to ban an extreme right-wing party, German politicians are considering changing the law to make it easier.

The new effort to rein in the National Democratic Party, or NPD, has an advocate in the Jewish community.

"A hearing to ban the NPD is the only and true way," Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, told reporters, while admitting that laws alone do not change views.

Critics counter that making it easier to ban a party isn't the way to go. They say the current obstacles to banning parties were put in place to counter the lawlessness of the Nazi justice system, protecting the good parties as well as the bad.

Many agree that the NPD is in the bad category. Party members have verbally attacked minority groups and called into question Germany's positions on Holocaust remembrance and its relationship to Israel.

One NPD legislator recently praised Hitler publicly, and the party's leaders and supporters oppose the European Union, routinely blaming Germany's economic woes on "foreigners."

In recent years — including in elections this fall — the NPD won enough votes to gain seats in parliaments in several former East German states, barely crossing the 5 percent threshold.

"The NPD is clearly an anti-constitutional party which uses violence to achieve its political goals," Peter Struck, head of the Social Democratic Party, told reporters Dec. 13. He urged the government to begin considering a new hearing on banning the NPD.


A two-thirds majority of 16 judges in the German Constitutional Court is required to ban a party. This should be changed to a simple majority, one Social Democratic official told the German Internet news agency Netzeitung.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union agrees with the Social Democrats, its coalition partner, that the NPD is anti-democratic. But Struck noted that the tough hurdle of a two-thirds majority was established after the Nazi period to safeguard democracy.

Some lawmakers suggest it would be unconstitutional, even anti-democratic, to reduce obstacles to banning a party.

In 2003, three judges halted a hearing on banning the NPD because informants who had infiltrated the party were among the court's witnesses. The judges said the informants might have influenced the NPD to engage in some of its illegal activities.

But the judges emphasized that the case could be brought up again. One former judge suggested that the informants withdraw from the NPD for two years before they could take part in a hearing. ■



**WORLD
REPORT**

Daniel J. Krifcher
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

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

Bush's Chanukah message takes aim at Iran

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The White House Christmas tree is up, the Christmas cards have been sent, but when it comes to policy, it's beginning to sound a lot like Chanukah.

President Bush and his Cabinet have seized upon the Maccabean message of refusing to give in to tyranny to reinforce Bush's refusal to deal with Iran as a means of resolving Iraq's burgeoning crisis. In at least one closed meeting, Bush made the connection explicitly.

The message is consistent with Bush's resistance to recommendations earlier this month by the congressionally mandated Iraq Study Group that the United States engage with Iran.

Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have rejected the study group's calls to bring Iran and Syria into regional talks on Iraq as long as those nations continue to back terrorism and Iran does not comply with international demands to stop a program that could culminate in nuclear weapons.

The tone was set with Bush's annual Chanukah message, released last Friday hours before the holiday began.

"After Jerusalem was conquered by an oppressive king and the Jews lost their right to worship in freedom, Judah Maccabee and his followers courageously set out to reclaim Jerusalem from foreign rule," Bush said. "Though their numbers were small, the Maccabees' dedication to their faith was strong, and they emerged victorious."

It was a contrast with Bush's Christmas message, which was focused on compassion.

"In this season of giving, we also remember the universal call to love our neighbors," Bush said.

The tough message re-emerged Sunday afternoon at the Chabad-Lubavitch-sponsored "national menorah lighting" on the ellipse in front of the White House.

"This menorah is a beacon that guides us away from the forces of darkness," said U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab, referring to last week's Holocaust-denial conference in Tehran.

Schwab, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, said she was delivering the message on Bush's behalf before she ascended in a scissor lift to light the

menorah's massive oil lamps.

On Monday night, Bush presided over the menorah lighting inside the White House.

"We pray that those who still live in the darkness of tyranny will someday see the light of freedom," he said, accompanied by his Jewish Cabinet members: Schwab, White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolten and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

Bush's linkage of the Chanukah message and Iran was explicit earlier Monday at a meeting that was expected to focus on Jewish higher education.

This year, participants said, Bush seemed more interested in discussing Iran.

"A lot of the conversation centered on Iran and on the president's conviction that they not be allowed to pick up a nuclear weapon," said Avi Mayer, a University of

Maryland undergraduate who was one of four students representing Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. "He said there's no use in propping up despots, they have to be confronted and brought to task for their actions."

To the extent that Bush discussed higher education, he emphasized its moral imperative against tyranny, said Julian Sandler, chairman of Hillel's board.

Bush said that despite declarations of piety from Muslim radicals now fighting the United States, he doubted that they believed in God.

"Terrorists' can't be God-believing people," Richard Joel, president of

Yeshiva University, quoted Bush as saying.

"The impression was of a resolute president with the courage of his convictions," Joel said. "There wasn't any sense he was about to renounce directions he has taken."

President Bush explicitly linked the Chanukah message and Iran at a meeting that was expected to focus on Jewish higher education.

Israeli court backs 'targeted killings'

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After nearly five years of deliberating one of Israel's most controversial military tactics, the country's top court has opted for a tacit endorsement.

In its long-awaited ruling on "targeted killings" of senior Palestinian terrorists, Israel's High Court of Justice on Thursday rejected civil-rights groups' demands for a blanket ban, but urged security forces to be discriminating.

"In its fight against international terrorism, Israel must act according to the rules of international law. These rules are based on balancing," wrote the three-justice panel headed by outgoing High Court President Aharon Barak. "Thus it is decided that it cannot be determined in advance that every targeted killing is prohibited according to customary international law, just as it cannot be determined in advance that every targeted killing is permissible according to customary international law."

Using precision air strikes or special forces on the ground, Israel began tracking and killing terrorist leaders soon after

the Palestinians launched the intifada in late 2000. Between 300 and 400 terrorists have died in missions that when mounted in urban areas have incurred civilian casualties as well. Israel says the practice has reduced terrorism by removing the leaders of terrorist groups and putting the groups on the defensive, forcing their members to hide rather than plot attacks.

The Palestinian Authority and many foreign nations have accused Israel of a policy of state-sponsored assassinations. But Israel says it is preventing imminent deadly attacks and that the alternative — arrest raids — is nearly impossible to carry out in P.A. areas.

The Palestinian Authority decried the High Court decision, as did P.A. advocates in Israel.

While the High Court has backed some controversial Israeli security practices in the past, it has curbed others — for example, the use of physical coercion in interrogations by the Shin Bet security service. It also has forced the Israeli government to reroute the West Bank security fence to minimize the hardship to Palestinians. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Tannenbaum admits drug deal

A former Israeli hostage of Hezbollah said he was abducted by the Lebanese militia while on a drug deal.

Elhanan Tannenbaum made the disclosure Wednesday while giving testimony at the trial of a former business partner. Tannenbaum, a reserve artillery colonel, said he was lured out to a Persian Gulf state in late 2000 by an Israeli Arab friend on the promise of a \$200,000 drug deal.

He accepted because of his financial difficulties, but soon found himself abducted by Hezbollah and taken to Lebanon. Tannenbaum was repatriated, along with the bodies of three Israeli soldiers killed on the Lebanese border, in 2004 in exchange for more than 400 Arab prisoners.

The deal rankled many Israelis at the time given rumors that Tannenbaum's illicit dealings had led to his captivity. Hezbollah accused him of being a spy, which Israel denied.

Two Fatah policemen killed amid truce

Hamas gunmen shot dead two Fatah policemen in Gaza. The Associated Press reported that the killings took place early Wednesday, shortly after the two sides had declared another truce. Fatah officials condemned the killings but said they remained committed to the truce.

Hamas officials described the incident as "an intense gunbattle." The streets of Gaza were relatively calm afterward, though mourners on the way to a Fatah funeral shot at Hamas gunmen and torched a car, the AP reported.

Commandos kill 2 terrorists

Israeli special forces killed two Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank.

Commandos raided the village of Silat Hartiya, near Jenin, on Wednesday and exchanged fire with two wanted members of Islamic Jihad. Both were killed.

Security sources said the terrorists had been planning attacks. In the Gaza Strip, Islamic Jihad retaliated by firing Kassam rockets into Israel. Six rockets hit Israel, but there was no damage.

Israel trims terror compensation

Israel is stopping compensation to its citizens who are bereaved or injured by terrorist attacks abroad.

The Knesset Labor and Welfare Committee this week put the final touches on an amendment under which the National Insurance Institute will pay compensation only to terror victims who are targeted within Israel's borders.

The new law will take effect next month. Previously, Israelis targeted abroad were eligible, but lawmakers decided on the change in light of the wave of international terrorism in recent years to prevent a deluge of compensation claims.

Lawmakers told Israeli media that it's up to each country where terrorists strike to compensate those hurt, no matter their nationality.

Court mulls Hamas lawmakers' Israeli citizenship

It was correct to strip four Hamas lawmakers of their Israeli citizenship, state representatives told Israel's highest court.

The Jerusalem Post reported Wednesday that parliamentarians Muhammad Abu Tir, Ahmed Abu Atoun and Khaled Abu Arafat, and Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Mahmoud Tota, all of eastern Jerusalem, had been stripped of their citizenship by Israel's Interior Ministry and petitioned the High Court of Justice to have it reinstated.

State representatives Gilad Shirman and Yochi Gnessin replied

that as leaders of a party sworn to destroy Israel, the Hamas members "seek to hold their Israeli identity cards in one hand while holding a gun aimed at Israel in the other," the paper reported. The court is set to rule Dec. 25.

Ben Gurion Airport is No. 1

Ben Gurion Airport was ranked No. 1 in Europe. Ha'aretz reported that in an Airports Council International passenger satisfaction survey of Europe's 40 most popular destinations, the international airport near Tel Aviv was named the best.

In a broader survey of 77 airports, Ben Gurion placed in the top 10. This comes two years after the opening of Ben Gurion's Terminal 3.

The airport received high scores for cleanliness, flight information screens and e-facilities. Travelers' most common complaint about the airport was "walking distance."

WORLD

Islamophobia on the rise, E.U. study reports

Europe's 13 million Muslims are experiencing an unprecedented level of discrimination at work and in public, a report found.

The Vienna-based European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia on Monday released its first report on Islamophobia.

The report notes that Muslims believe they are often seen as terrorist suspects and, in many cases, live on the lowest economic rungs of society.

Responding to the report, European Jewish Congress President Pierre Besnainou told JTA that political correctness in Europe makes people feel that Islamophobia is interesting while anti-Semitism is not.

"The most recent report by the monitoring center on anti-Semitism issued earlier this year contains no effort to obtain new information and merely relies on an older report," he said.

But, Besnainou added, "Of course we cannot deny the existence of Islamophobia, and we as Jews are against any form of racism."

Georgian president lights menorah

Georgia's president held a menorah-lighting ceremony.

Thousands of Georgian Jews came to the Grand Synagogue in Tbilisi on Monday to watch Mikhail Saakashvili light a giant menorah in a ceremony aired on national television.

The Georgian president expressed his solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people.

NORTH AMERICA

Survivor, violinist Meyer dies at 83

Henry Meyer, a violinist in the LaSalle Quartet and a Holocaust survivor, died at 83.

He succumbed to heart disease Monday in Cincinnati. Born in Dresden, Germany, Meyer was a child prodigy, the Cincinnati Enquirer reported.

He survived four Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, where a Jewish doctor recognized him from a concert and saved him by placing a corpse in his bed, buying time for the ill 19-year-old to recover. Meyer escaped in 1945 after being selected for a prisoner orchestra. After the war, President Eisenhower pushed through Meyer's visa. In 1953 he started playing with the famed LaSalle Quartet, based at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where he later became a professor emeritus. He continued to teach around the world until three years ago, when a car accident put him in a wheelchair.