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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hamas renews threats

Hamas officials renewed their threats to avenge the death of their chief bombmaker amid reports that the circumstances of his death remain a mystery.

The Palestinian pathologist who initially said that Mahiyedine Sharif was shot dead before his body was planted in a car and an explosion was set off on March 29, now says it is difficult to say whether Sharif was shot before or after the explosion. Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's wife, Suha, told Sharif's family, "We consider him a Palestinian martyr." [Page 3]

Israeli Arabs call for strike

Israeli Arab leaders called for a strike to protest what they said was police violence against Bedouin demonstrators near the town of Shfaram in the Galilee. Clashes erupted Saturday night when Israeli police tried to break up protests against the demolition of homes that Israeli officials said were illegally built in a Bedouin community near the town.

Holocaust memorial defaced

A monument to the victims of the Holocaust at a Jewish cemetery in Latvia was smeared with black paint.

The incident in the western city of Liepaja occurred two days after a bomb ripped through the synagogue in the Baltic nation's capital of Riga.

Prosecutors target Le Pen

German prosecutors asked the European Union to lift the immunity of a French far-right leader who holds a seat in the E.U. Parliament. The prosecutors want to charge Jean-Marie Le Pen with instigating racial incitement for allegedly reiterating before a German audience last December his belief that the Holocaust is a "mere detail of history."

Le Pen has already been convicted and fined for making similar remarks in France.

Report: Swiss hold 700 works

A Swiss newspaper reported that more than 700 artworks looted by the Nazis are being held by museums and private collectors in Switzerland.

The *Sonntags Blick*, citing a Swiss historian, said the artworks have an estimated value of several million dollars.

ISRAEL AT 50

Vastly different kibbutzim struggle to hold on to youth

By Avi Machlis

KIBBUTZ KFAR RUPPIN, Israel (JTA) — Bicycles are lined up outside the communal dining hall here at Kibbutz Kfar Ruppim. Nearby, a handful of teen-agers gather outside on the lush green grounds of the kibbutz, which is nestled between the town of Beit She'an and the Jordanian border in northeastern Israel.

But the near-perfect setting masks a disturbing reality: Kfar Ruppim, like many of the other approximately 270 graying communal settlements across the country, is having trouble attracting the children who were raised on the kibbutz to settle there as adults.

"There's no social life, no place to have fun and it's distant from employment opportunities," says Dana Levy, 17, who will soon join the Israeli army. "Changes or no changes, it will make no difference. This kibbutz is going to become a retirement home."

Her statement is not far from the truth. On Kfar Ruppim alone, about 25 percent of the 180 members are pensioners.

The kibbutzim, the first of which was founded more than 75 years ago, never attracted more than a small minority of Jews. But kibbutz members played a vital role in building the Jewish state in its early years, providing a disproportionate number of Knesset members and soldiers in elite defense units. In addition, the kibbutz played a large role in the national psyche as a symbol of a strong, pioneering Israel.

But that symbol has largely vanished, and the kibbutz is no longer considered a viable alternative lifestyle by Israeli youth, who are drawn to the prosperity and excitement of urban centers. Kibbutzim, once considered bold social experiments — where everything from money to meals was a communal enterprise — have periodically changed their ideology to fit the needs of their members.

For example, communal children's homes, in which children lived almost from birth, a symbol of kibbutz life, began to disappear long ago. Last year, they became extinct when Kibbutz Baram in the Galilee shut down the last existing children's home.

But according to Shlomo Getz, a sociologist at the Institute for the Research of the Kibbutz at Haifa University and a member of Kibbutz Gadot, the kibbutzim are now facing their greatest crisis.

The problems began in the mid-1980s, when the kibbutzim encountered a major financial crisis. Billions of shekels of bad debts to the banking system, says Getz, "created a feeling that the concept had failed." He says the crisis had an impact on everything "from demography to social life" and triggered a "revolution" that led to sweeping changes in kibbutz life over the past 10 years.

Kfar Ruppim, which emerged relatively sound from the financial crisis, had already begun to move away from the agriculture that was the traditional source of kibbutz income. Today, the kibbutz has thriving fish ponds that generate more than \$4 million in annual revenues and a plastics plant that takes in about \$8.5 million a year.

And Kfar Ruppim has almost as many paid workers as it does kibbutz members. Some kibbutzim have long hired outside workers to do manual labor that their members preferred not to do, but the number has greatly increased in recent years. About 140 workers at Kfar Ruppim are residents of Beit She'an, a neighboring development town. At the same time, some 40 kibbutz members work off the kibbutz and generate 20 percent of Kfar Ruppim's \$17 million total annual revenue.

Indeed, most kibbutzim employ workers who are not kibbutz members, and some

MIDEAST FOCUS

Military parade planned

Israel is planning its biggest military parade in Jerusalem in 25 years next month on the anniversary of the 1967 Six-Day War. The event marking the capture of the Old City and eastern Jerusalem is part of wider celebrations marking Israel's 50th anniversary. Between 12,000 and 14,000 soldiers are expected to take part in the parade, the most in the city since 1973, an official said.

Plans for immigrants criticized

An Ethiopian member of Knesset is criticizing a move to settle some Ethiopian immigrants in the West Bank. Labor Knesset member Adisu Massala made his comments as Israel plans to conclude a campaign to bring over some 1,300 Falash Mura waiting at a camp in Ethiopia within three to four months as part of a family reunification plan.

Since the Israeli government made a decision two years ago to bring over the community of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity or were assimilated, some 4,200 people have immigrated to Israel.

Iran, Iraq reach agreement

Iran and Iraq reached an agreement to exchange all prisoners from their 1980-1988 war, according to the Iranian foreign minister. Observers said the agreement reflected a significant improvement in relations between the two countries.

Snake found on El Al flight

A poisonous snake was discovered on an El Al plane during a routine maintenance check after it landed at Ben-Gurion Airport, airline officials said.

A snake-catcher was dispatched to the plane when maintenance workers spotted it near the cockpit after the passengers had disembarked.

An El Al spokesman said it appeared that one of the passengers had smuggled the snake on board, and realizing it had gotten loose, feared reporting it.

80 percent encourage their members to seek outside employment, according to a recent survey conducted by Getz.

There have been social changes as well. In recent years, many kibbutzim have taken steps to "privatize" various elements of their social life. At about half of all kibbutzim, members now eat dinner at their private homes and pay for lunch at the dining hall out of their monthly allocations.

These moves aim to give kibbutz members more freedom in deciding how they spend their share of the communal pie. On some kibbutzim, even the pie is no longer cut into equal slices. At Kfar Ruppim, and about 30 percent of all kibbutzim, members are now paid wages based on their jobs. While the difference between high and low earners at Kfar Ruppim is only \$140, the concept marks a radical shift from the socialist dogma upon which the kibbutz was founded.

Michael Lanir sees no other way to breathe life back into the kibbutz than to sacrifice some of its sacred cows. As secretary of Kfar Ruppim, he is responsible for organizing its social life. He is also at the vanguard of efforts within the United Kibbutz Movement, which represents about 60 percent of all kibbutzim, to adapt to the times.

"At the end of the 20th century, it is very difficult to have an egalitarian kibbutz," he says. "It simply doesn't work."

Lanir, 57, was born at Kfar Ruppim. His family left for 12 years and then returned in 1954. He sees it as his personal mission to ensure the continuation of the kibbutz movement. "The challenge today is to mold the kibbutz into something different without turning it into Tel Aviv," he says, toying with his watch while speaking, as if he knows that time is running out for kibbutz life.

But what will remain of the unique collective lifestyle after the changes are made?

"I hope a happy person will remain," says Lanir. "Because at the end of the 20th century, people are no longer happy without property and the ability to help out their kids. Today, kibbutz members only own their furniture. After 38 years of hard work, I own nothing."

Lanir is now trying to forge changes that could be the kiss of death to some of the kibbutz's founding principles.

A new neighborhood is being built adjacent to Kfar Ruppim to attract outsiders who are interested in enjoying rural kibbutz life without becoming members. In addition, Lanir would like to see kibbutz assets, such as homes, allocated to members. According to his plan, even shares in kibbutz industries would be distributed to members.

Plans like these, however, were recently rejected by the Kibbutz Artzi movement, the most devoutly socialist group, which represents approximately 85 kibbutzim.

There are also about 19 religious kibbutzim.

At the Kibbutz Artzi movement's last annual meeting, the group reaffirmed fundamental principles of the kibbutz, such as common ownership of assets and communal distribution of social services and education. They also rejected the differential wage system. Avshalom Vilan, that movement's head, says the kibbutz does not have to sacrifice socialism in order to revitalize itself.

Meanwhile, on Kfar Ruppim, Hana Raz, 71, contemplates the changes she has seen since she arrived at the kibbutz in 1949 as a young idealistic socialist from Czechoslovakia. Raz has seen much hardship. Her parents died in the Holocaust. She survived because she was sent to live with a Christian family in England.

And life was not easy on Kfar Ruppim in the early days. She remembers that for years, there was no running water in her home. Later, the kibbutz endured cross-border shellings from Palestinians in Jordan. Today, her house has many "creature comforts" — an air conditioner, television and stereo — but is sparsely furnished in the tradition of simplicity of the old kibbutz days.

In her heart, Raz is still a socialist, and the recent changes — especially wage policy — have been very difficult to digest. "The changes have been very drastic, and in a way they have touched upon the basic principles of the kibbutz," she says.

Raz concedes that the changes may be inevitable, but hopes that history will be kind.

"I did something which I felt was worthwhile, and it will last, even if not in my kibbutz," she says. "I only hope that in the future it will be more appreciated in Israel than it is today."



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Caryn Rosen Adelman, President
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JEWISH WORLD

Swiss bank pledges fight

Switzerland's central bank said it would fight back if U.S. lawyers file a lawsuit relating to its purchases of looted Nazi gold.

The Swiss National Bank was responding to news reports that a new class action lawsuit was being prepared in the United States aimed at claiming damages for Holocaust survivors.

The bank said in a statement that any such action "has no basis in law" and that an out-of-court settlement is out of the question.

Britain invites claims

Britain invited claims for compensation from people whose family property was seized during World War II.

The government also apologized to Holocaust survivors for treating them insensitively after the war.

During the war, Britain confiscated property owned by companies or individuals in "enemy countries," including those occupied by Germany.

A report by Britain's Holocaust Education Trust last year said the government made it difficult for Holocaust survivors to reclaim their money after the war.

Papon asked to pay \$1.6 million

Prosecutors in the war crimes trial of former Vichy France official Maurice Papon asked a French court to order him to pay \$1.6 million in legal fees. Papon was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in deporting French Jews during World War II.

All 24 lawyers for the civil plaintiffs worked for free during the duration of the six-month trial and the months of preparation that preceded it, leaving many of them in financial straits.

Neo-Nazis seek president's help

A Lithuanian neo-Nazi group that has pledged to "clean" the country of all its minorities called on the nation's president to help it receive registration as an officially recognized political group. President Valdas Adamkus denied the request because he is "convinced that a democratic society cannot put up with organizations instigating racial and religious discord," according to a presidential spokesman.

Journalist gets death threats

A Moscow journalist received death threats from a Russian Islamic group after he wrote an article about Salman Rushdie's book, "The Satanic Verses."

The article appeared in the daily newspaper Izvestia amid reports that the first Russian translation of the controversial book would be published soon. Islamic officials in Russia criticized the death threats, but said the translation would not be welcome.

Israel, Palestinians differ on who killed bombmaker

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the atmosphere of threats, accusations and denials heats up, the circumstances surrounding the death of the Hamas movement's chief bombmaker remain shrouded in mystery.

While Israel has denied any involvement in the death, Hamas officials have renewed their threats to avenge the killing of Mohiyedine Sharif, vowing to strike at Jewish targets in Israel and abroad. Sunday's threats came amid reports that the Palestinian pathologist who initially said last week that Sharif was shot dead before his body was planted in a car and an explosion set off on March 29, now says it is difficult to say whether Sharif was shot before or after the explosion.

At the same time, Palestinian police are looking into the theory that Sharif was shot by a Hamas member who collaborated with Israel. Palestinian police, stung by a different theory, summoned a Hamas spokesman for questioning after he reportedly stated that Sharif had been assassinated by the Palestinian preventive security service.

The spokesman, Abdel Aziz Rantissi, who was quoted by the Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio's Arabic service, said Sharif had been tortured by Palestinian security officials to provide the names of those Palestinians who helped him hide.

Rantissi reportedly added that in order to cover up the arrest, Palestinian security officials put Sharif's body in the car and blew it up.

Rantissi later denied the remarks attributed to him.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's wife, Suha, told Sharif's family during a condolence visit, "We consider him a Palestinian martyr."

Sharif, 32, was seen as the heir to Yehiya Ayash, who was killed by a booby-trapped cellular phone in the Gaza Strip in January 1996. Ayash had topped Israel's most-wanted list for masterminding a series of suicide bombings that killed scores of Israelis. Sharif, too, was on Israel's list of wanted Hamas terrorists for his involvement in planning several suicide bombings.

But observers point to a difference between Israeli officials' public stances in the two cases: While Israel would neither confirm nor deny accusations that it was behind Ayash's death, in Sharif's case the denials have been unequivocal. Indeed, the head of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence service was dispatched last week to tell Arafat that Israel had nothing to do with Sharif's death. Israeli officials believe that Sharif was killed during an accident at a bomb-making factory in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu charged Sunday that last week's explosion provided proof that the Palestinian Authority was not taking sufficient steps to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in the autonomous areas.

Netanyahu has made such a crackdown a precondition for advancing the deadlocked negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

"As was proved in the recent case in which another bomb factory was discovered in Ramallah, right under the noses of the Palestinian Authority, there exists a widespread Hamas terrorist infrastructure in territories against which the Palestinian Authority is not acting systematically," Netanyahu was quoted as saying in a statement issued after Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting.

Meanwhile, an Israeli army officer in the Ramallah area said that even if Sharif's death were part of an internal Palestinian dispute, Israel would be the target of a retaliation. Netanyahu demanded last Friday that Palestinian officials stop blaming Israel for Sharif's death and warned he would hold them responsible for any revenge attacks against Israel.

Israeli security forces remained on high alert Sunday.

In the Gaza Strip, border police and army troops dismantled a small homemade bomb that had been left at a perimeter fence near the Gush Katif bloc of Jewish settlements. A sign with anti-Jewish slogans was found attached to the package.

Near Ramallah, Israeli security forces detained five Palestinians suspected of throwing stones last Friday at an Israeli car, seriously wounding the driver. Eliezer Frankel of Rishon le-Zion remained in serious condition at Hadassah Hospital. □

Jewish support builds for anti-persecution bill

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As Congress took its first action last month on legislation targeted at religious persecution abroad, support for such a law continued to build among Jewish groups.

The House International Relations Committee approved the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act by a vote of 31-5, handing a victory to religious activists who began trumpeting the cause more than a year ago.

But in the Senate, alternative legislation has emerged that is further complicating an already complicated and contentious issue — and its implications for Israel seem to be one source of concern.

The measure, introduced by Sens. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Don Nickles (R-Okla.), contains a far broader definition of persecution, prompting concerns among some Jewish activists about what it would mean for Israel.

Because single acts, rather than a pattern of abuse committed on account of an individual's religious beliefs, would apparently constitute religious persecution under the Senate bill, some activists say certain Israeli practices toward Palestinians — such as detentions, interrogations, curfews and closures — could come under scrutiny, even though religious, not political, actions are the target of the proposed legislation.

"Israel could be held as restricting religious freedom under the Senate version," one Jewish lobbyist said.

Another said: "We're still thinking about it and digesting it."

A spokesman for Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, said, "It's a universal standard, it applies to everybody," but added, "Israel's record is an extremely good one."

The measure that passed the House International Relations Committee, sponsored by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), specifically targets "widespread and ongoing" government acts of abduction, enslavement, imprisonment, forced mass relocation, rape, crucifixion and other forms of torture of religious minorities.

It would bar all but humanitarian aid to countries engaged in the persecution of religious minorities, ban exports of equipment that could be used as instruments of torture by oppressive governments and make it easier for those fleeing religious persecution to be granted asylum.

Over the course of the past year, the fight against worldwide religious persecution has emerged as a leading political cause.

The bill's sponsors say most of the abuses are occurring within militant Islamic countries and the few remaining Communist nations.

They have cited Sudan, China, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Vietnam and Algeria as some of the worst offenders.

Proponents of the campaign in the Christian community have sought input and support from Jewish leaders from the beginning as they looked to model their campaign after the Jewish community's successful efforts to free Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s.

But Jewish groups, while supporting the concept of combating religious persecution, have feared that the bill would do more harm than good and elevate the cause of religious persecution over other human rights concerns.

The Anti-Defamation League endorsed the legislation last month, saying that recent modifications have satisfied concerns about whether the measure can effectively address the problem.

In a letter to members of the House International Relations Committee, the ADL said it "supports combating all forms of oppression with equal vigor, but we also recognize the value of spotlighting problems such as religious persecution which is a bellwether for how countries behave on other fronts."

The Orthodox Union also announced its support for the bill, joining the Reform movement's Religious Action Center and the Republican-aligned National Jewish Coalition, both of which got behind the bill last year.

Some mainstream Jewish groups continue to express reservations about the measure, saying more changes may be needed before they can get behind it.

The Council of Jewish Federations and the American Jewish Committee, for example, say they are concerned about the requirement that sanctions automatically be imposed against offending countries.

They fear that it may straitjacket U.S. foreign policy.

The Clinton administration, which opposes the Wolf-Specter bill, has raised similar objections.

House Republican leaders, for their part, have declared the Wolf-Specter bill a high priority.

The Republicans say that they hope to bring it up for a floor vote in coming months after it wends its way through two more committees.

No action has been scheduled in the Senate. □

Kiryas Joel loses new bid to establish school district

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The New York State Supreme Court has dealt another blow to attempts to allow a Chasidic Jewish community in New York to set up its own school district.

The court ruled that the latest bid by state lawmakers to create a special school district for Kiryas Joel — an Orange County, N.Y. village whose residents are all Satmar Chasidim — violates the separation of church and state.

Twice before courts have struck down legislators' attempts to carve out an autonomous school district for Kiryas Joel so that the community can control the special education of its students and the \$3 million in state aid it qualifies for each year.

The attempt to create the district is a "clear, unequivocal, but impermissible favoritism, promotion, preference and endorsement by the state of the Satmar community of Kiryas Joel," State Supreme Court Justice Joseph Teresi ruled.

He ordered that the Kiryas Joel school district be closed immediately and that nearby public school districts take over the instruction of its children.

The Kiryas Joel school district, which has said its disabled students do not learn well in non-Chasidic schools, will likely appeal the decision, according to Nathan Lewin, the district's lawyer.

The American Jewish Congress hailed the decision, saying "once again, what the legislature has created for political reasons, the courts have undone for constitutional reasons." □