



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel cleared in killing

A Hamas bomb-maker was killed by other Hamas members in an apparent power struggle, Palestinian Authority officials said.

The Palestinians had initially blamed Israel for the death of Mohiyedine Sharif, whose body was discovered riddled with bullet holes after a car bomb exploded in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Five Hamas members have been arrested in connection with the murder. Authorities are still searching for the gunman. [Page 4]

### Ban imposed on assault weapons

The Clinton administration's ban on imports of 58 types of military-style assault weapons slams the door on Israel's efforts to sell thousands of such weapons.

The move, prompted in part by Israel's attempts to export semiautomatic assault rifles to the United States, blocks the entry of more than 1 million high-powered guns into the country. [Page 2]

### Netanyahu circulates petition

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recruited all Cabinet members to sign a request to President Clinton seeking a pardon for convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz, quoting government sources, said Netanyahu hoped to gather 100 signatures from members of the Knesset to add to the letter. Pollard, a former U.S. naval analyst, is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

### Ukrainian Jews calm after vote

Ukrainian Jews reacted calmly to the preliminary results of last week's parliamentary elections that predict a victory for the Communist Party.

Although official returns of the elections are expected to be announced only in mid-April, it is already clear that the Communist Party and its left-wing allies will form the biggest bloc in the new Parliament, with 180 of 450 seats.

President Leonid Kuchma has pledged to continue with the country's reform program, despite the large gains by the Communists. Commentators have attributed the swing to the left as a vote against the economic malaise. Living standards have plummeted in recent years for Ukraine's 52 million residents.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Students make Passover popular holiday in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Until 1995, Alexander Vladimirov had never attended a Passover seder.

"I knew absolutely nothing about Pesach," says Vladimirov, a sociology major at the Jewish University here.

Today, the 20-year-old is in charge of the Passover Project at the Moscow Hillel Center. And he's not alone. Vladimirov is just one of hundreds of young activists who have been trained to conduct Passover seders for the Jewish community.

The 3-year-old project includes an extensive network of seminars organized by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

This year, a special grant from the U.S.-based May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation will allow some 400 Hillel activists — many of whom are participating in a seder for the first time — to conduct more than 500 seders in more than 200 communities. The result: Passover is the most widely celebrated Jewish holiday in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

During the few weeks before Passover, training seminars prepare student volunteers to conduct the seders in areas as far-flung as Siberia and the Far East.

Some of the seminar leaders are Israelis. Some are local students who led seders for the first time last year, in addition to the North American Jewish students who were expected to travel to the former Soviet Union to participate in this project.

The students who lead seders grew up in typically assimilated Soviet Jewish backgrounds, says Vladimirov, adding that before his first seder he knew more about Russian Orthodox holidays than about Passover.

But after they receive training, students know more about Passover than almost all members of local Jewish communities.

Leading the seders is not always easy. "We often come to a community, and people look at us as if we were aliens from another planet," says Masha Golberg, a 21-year-old math student and a Moscow Hillel activist.

Eugenia Mikhaleva, Moscow Hillel Center's executive director, says that the seders demand a combination of tradition and the students' creative innovations.

Because of the special needs of the Jewish community in the former Soviet Union, for example, the seders are conducted throughout the week of Passover — in the mornings, afternoons and evenings.

"Students try to apply different approaches to different audiences. The elderly appreciate more storytelling and Yiddish singing. Kids want to play, and a mixed gathering would be a grateful audience for a short performance based on the Passover story," says Vladimirov.

Wine is still scarce in many communities — students often have to carry backpacks with Passover kits that include matzahs, bottles of wine and Haggadot, the book that guides people through a seder meal.

"If we want to get rid of vodka on the Pesach table, we should bring kosher wine," says Mikhaleva.

Activists always have to call in advance to tell local community leaders what should appear on the tables. "Usually, people come to eat, drink and talk. This isn't their fault. This is their understanding of a holiday. Our task is to change this attitude," says

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Committee's proposals adopted

An Israeli ministerial committee agreed to set aside funds from the state budget in order to establish a pluralistic conversion training institute.

The Ne'eman Committee, which was seeking to resolve the conversion crisis in Israel, recommended that an institute made up of rabbis from the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform streams be created to educate potential converts, but that the actual conversions be performed by Orthodox rabbis. The first course of the institute is expected to be offered in Beersheba.

### Ross to brief American officials

U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross is scheduled to brief President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on his recent meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. Clinton is expected to call the two leaders later this week before determining the next step in the peace process.

### Lebanese civilian killed

A Lebanese civilian was killed and three others wounded in two bomb explosions near the border fence with Israel. Israeli forces conducted searches for the perpetrators of the attacks.

Israeli media reported that it appeared Israeli troops who patrol the area were the intended targets. No Israeli troops were injured.

### Committee on surrogacy stops

An Israeli committee on surrogacy suspended its activities. The decision by the commission, which reviews requests for surrogate mothers, was made after the first woman to serve as a surrogate in Israel described severe emotional suffering after the birth. The woman gave birth to twins two months ago. Under the agreement reached with the parents, the woman did not see the babies, but heard their cries when they were born.

Vladimirov, sounding like a Jewish activist in the West. "We are bringing a small revolution into these people's life. But we have to do it delicately, to introduce formal things step by step. We shouldn't frighten them."

Why do students whose ages range from 17 to 34 join a project that requires a substantial investment of their time and energy?

The reward comes in different ways. Students enjoy Jewish camaraderie, traveling — and digging deep into their Jewish roots. Mikhaleva says that the Passover Project is an effective way to recruit new people to Hillel's activities.

For many, the participation in the Passover Project also represents one of the first serious accomplishments in their lives. "This is one of the major tasks for Hillel — to give people an opportunity for self-realization," says Mikhaleva.

Vladimirov remembers the first seder he conducted for a group of Jewish elderly in St. Petersburg.

"They had not had seders since childhood and did not remember much," he recalls. "Suddenly, I realized that I was only helping them to release their own memories." □

## Ban on assault weapons terminates Israeli exports

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton's executive order banning imports of 58 types of assault weapons slams the door on Israel's attempts to sell thousands of military-style rifles in the United States.

The move closes a loophole in a 1994 assault weapons ban through which thousands of foreign-made assault rifles have found their way to American shores.

Some foreign gun manufacturers, such as Israel Military Industries, which is owned by the Israeli government, have been modifying semiautomatic rifles for "sporting purposes" in order to evade restrictions.

In fact it was the planned exports from Israel that first prompted congressional scrutiny of the issue. Israel had expected to sell about 10,000 of the assault weapons — worth approximately \$7 million — to the United States during the next three to four years, according to Israel Military Industries.

Israel has said throughout the controversy that it was abiding by U.S. law and would continue to do so in accordance with any change. Indeed, an Israeli official indicated the government would comply with the ban.

David Rubin, Israel's economic minister to North America, said the ban would not significantly affect the Israeli economy in light of the relatively small number of exports.

Clinton's decision comes after Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), a staunch gun-control advocate, enlisted the support of 29 colleagues in an attempt to stop the export of the Israeli weapons. The Israeli government at first resisted, but then decided to suspend the sale of the Uzi American and the Galil Sporter in the U.S. civilian market, due to what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the "special sensitivity" of the issue in the United States.

The focus on Israel eventually broadened to include at least a dozen other countries — including Russia, Greece and Bulgaria — that were also modifying their weapons to sell in the United States. In response to the lawmakers' outcry, Clinton in November ordered a 120-day suspension on import permits for about 43 types of modified assault weapons while his administration studied whether they could be permanently blocked.

Announcing the ban at a White House ceremony Monday, Clinton vowed "to do our best to keep our people alive."

"There are still far too many children in harm's way, too many families behind locked doors, too many guns in the hands of too many criminals," he said.

Last year, weapons importers obtained permits to ship in nearly 600,000 altered guns, and applications were pending for 1 million more. Some 20,000 of the 600,000 have already have entered the country.

Clinton's order, which comes in the wake of last month's schoolyard killing in Jonesboro, Ark., had been widely anticipated since he imposed the temporary ban. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Report: Banks aware of actions

Switzerland's central bank knew it was financing the Nazi war effort through its gold and trade deals, according to a magazine report.

Newsweek cites an as-of-yet unreleased report by the Swiss commission looking into the activities of Swiss banks during World War II.

The Swiss National Bank has refused to offer restitution to Jews, despite the fact that it received the majority of Nazi gold.

### Russian court blocks return of art

Russia's constitutional court ruled that President Boris Yeltsin could not block laws approved twice by Parliament, thus halting the Kremlin's plans to return art looted from Germany at the end of World War II.

But the argument between Yeltsin and both houses of Parliament can still drag on for months. Yeltsin is now likely to appeal to the court over alleged parliamentary irregularities when the bill was approved last year.

Germany, Russia's biggest economic partner and creditor, wants Moscow to return some 200,000 pieces of art — the value of which has been estimated at about \$65 billion.

### Group calls for army head to quit

Latvia's National Security Council recommended that the army's commander in chief, Juris Dalbins, be ousted for participating in a recent parade of Latvian veterans who served in a Nazi SS unit during World War II.

The Latvian Parliament is expected to approve the recommendation later this month.

The action comes in the aftermath of the bombing last week of the synagogue in the Latvian capital of Riga.

### Italy confiscates artworks

Italian officials confiscated artworks on loan from a New Zealand gallery because they were allegedly stolen from the former head of Florence's Jewish community during World War II.

New Zealand authorities claim they did not know the paintings were stolen and are demanding they be returned.

### NAACP chief urges cooperation

The chairman of the NAACP told a gathering of Jewish leaders that Jews and blacks should mend their fences and work together to "make the American promise real."

Speaking at the annual gathering of the Anti-Defamation League, Julian Bond told participants the two groups should work together toward the day when groups like the NAACP and the ADL are not necessary.

## Crown Heights settlement provides measure of relief

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The four days of rioting that tore Crown Heights apart seven years ago so frightened Michael Chazan that he fled his Brooklyn, N.Y., neighborhood for a week. Some friends, he recalls, were pulled from their cars and beaten by angry blacks while others had rocks and bricks hurled through their windows.

Inspired to become politically active, the first thing he did when he returned was to join the Jewish community's volunteer "Shmira," or watchdog, program, which has men patrolling the community at night.

At the same time, he wanted to work to improve relations between the black and Jewish communities. He got involved with the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council and the Crown Heights Coalition, which is composed of leaders from the Jewish, African American and Caribbean American communities in the Brooklyn neighborhood.

Now, in the wake of an official apology and financial settlement by New York City — as well as the sentencing of one of those involved in the murder of a Jewish scholar — there is, Chazan believes, at last partial closure to what Jews in the Brooklyn, N.Y., neighborhood universally refer to as "the pogrom."

The apology and financial settlement are "very important for the people of Crown Heights psychologically," said Chazan, who installs security systems for a living.

In a strongly worded statement issued last week, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani apologized to the neighborhood's Jewish residents, nearly all of whom are connected with the Lubavitch Chasidic movement.

The apology came as part of a settlement in which the city agreed to pay a total of \$1.1 million to the 91 plaintiffs involved in a class-action lawsuit that had been filed after the melee in August 1991. The rioting began after a car driven by a Jew accidentally struck and killed a young black boy. The lead attorney for the plaintiffs declined to specify how they would divide up those funds.

The father-and-son pair of Isaac and Yechiel Bitton, whose terror was captured in a widely reproduced photo showing the child crouched next to his battered father lying on the street during the rioting, had filed a separate lawsuit. They settled with the city two months ago for \$200,000.

Last week's settlement came one day after Lemrick Nelson was sentenced to the maximum term of 19 ½ years for violating Yankel Rosenbaum's civil rights when he stabbed the Australian scholar on the first night of the riots.

A 1993 report published by the state found that the city's leaders, including then-Mayor David Dinkins and Police Commissioner Lee Brown, who is now mayor of Houston, Texas, did not adequately protect Crown Heights' Jews.

"In the spirit of conciliation, the City of New York accepts responsibility for the mistakes that were made in August 1991, and apologizes to the residents of Crown Heights," Giuliani said in a statement.

"The City of New York hereby reaffirms that in the future it will not allow several days of rioting without adequate response," he said. "There is no excuse for allowing people to victimize others based on their race, religion, ethnicity or for any other reason without a strong and immediate response from city government."

The settlement and apology are "warranted and appropriate," said Michael Miller, executive vice president of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

To the Jews of Crown Heights, the settlement and apology "mean, finally, official recognition for the horrible, anti-Semitic violence to which they were subjected" during the riots, said Franklyn Snitow, the class-action suit's lead attorney, who negotiated the settlement with the city.

Chazan, now a board member of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council and liaison to the police precinct, said he believes that relations between Jews and blacks there are "generally very good." He doesn't expect the latest developments to turn the clock backward to more tense times.

"For every one incident you read about, there are 1,000 good [interracial] incidents in Crown Heights," Chazan said. □

## Hamas terror threat looms as Palestinians clear Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Palestinian Authority and Hamas may be headed for a confrontation.

The possible showdown comes in the wake of last week's murder of Hamas' chief bomb-maker, Mohiyedine Sharif, who was found murdered in the West Bank.

Hamas blamed Israel for the killing and vowed to avenge Sharif's death, raising fears of possible suicide bombing attacks during the Passover holiday.

But the Palestinian Authority this week cleared Israel of blame, saying that Sharif had been murdered by other Hamas members in an apparent internal struggle in the militant Islamic group.

A Palestinian official said Monday that five Hamas members had been detained in connection with Sharif's death. A sixth man, who was believed to have shot Sharif, was still at large.

Israel, which had adamantly denied any involvement in the murder, welcomed the Palestinian Authority announcement.

But Hamas, which threatened new terrorist attacks, called the latest statements by the self-rule authority "lies," resulting from American and Israeli pressure.

The self-rule authority announcement was the latest twist in the inquiry into the circumstances of Sharif's death.

The militant's body was identified by Palestinian police on April 1, several days after it had been found next to a bombed vehicle near the Palestinian-controlled town of Ramallah in the West Bank.

Palestinian security officials had initially reported that the car explosion was apparently a "work accident" involving Hamas terrorists planning to carry out an attack inside Israel. At first, Palestinian officials could not identify at first the body of the man killed in the blast.

But Palestinian security officials informed their Israeli counterparts that they believed the body was Sharif, and Israeli security forces asked that DNA testing be conducted.

The murder came amid recent warnings from Israeli intelligence officials that Hamas members were planning to carry out a massive attack in Israel. Those concerns were heightened after Palestinian officials confirmed that the body was Sharif.

The head of Israel's General Security Service, Ami Ayalon, met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat last week to discuss the Hamas threat and the effect a terror attack could have on the faltering peace process.

Ayalon reportedly told the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday that Arafat had agreed that an act of terrorism could undermine the effort to bring about a further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank.

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.

Ayash's death set off a wave of suicide bombings in early

1996, and Hamas officials renewed their threats Sunday to strike at Jewish targets in Israel and abroad to avenge Sharif's murder.

But Hamas officials also offered another theory that blamed Sharif's death on the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas spokesman Abdel Aziz Rantissi was quoted as blaming the Palestinian preventive security service for murdering Sharif. He later denied his remarks.

Palestinian Authority official Nabil Sha'ath, who last week had blamed Israel for the killing, said Monday that the self-rule authority had conclusively determined that Sharif was killed as part of an internal feud in Hamas.

"I can now say that Israel was not responsible," Sha'ath was quoted as saying.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he regretted that "senior officials in the Palestinian Authority hastened to point a finger at Israel." □

## Russian faces death threats for article on 'Satanic Verses'

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Nearly a decade after author Salman Rushdie received an Islamic death sentence for writing "The Satanic Verses," a Moscow journalist has received death threats for an article he wrote about the book.

During the past several weeks, Yuri Buyda, a journalist for the daily Izvestia, received anonymous phone calls saying he and his family would be killed if the article were published.

The anonymous caller claimed he was speaking on behalf of an obscure group calling itself Military Islam.

Russian security officials put the journalist under surveillance and wiretapped his telephone in an effort to locate the caller.

Izvestia ran Buyda's article last Friday.

After Iran's late spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death sentence on the author of the 1988 novel — which Islamic leaders said slandered the prophet Mohammed — several individuals involved in translating and publishing the book were killed, including the novel's Italian, Japanese and Norwegian translators.

Rushdie has remained in hiding since the death edict was issued, making only a few surprise public appearances.

Buyda said he was terrified by the threats.

"The man told me I was a propagandist, that I was advocating anti-Islamic literature," he said in an interview.

The article in Izvestia coincided with news that the first Russian translation of the controversial book by the Indian-born British author would be published next month by a Russian publishing house.

But a spokesman for Rushdie's London publisher said a decision had not yet been finalized about a Russian translation.

Meanwhile, Islamic leaders in Russia criticized the death threats, but said the translation would not be welcome.

Marat Murtazin, director of the Moscow High Islamic College, said, "Discriminating against the journalist is absolutely wrong."

Murtazin added that if a translation of the book were published in Russia, it would "come as a serious affront to all who uphold the Muslim faith."

There are some 15 million Muslims in Russia — about 10 percent of the country's total population. □