



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Iranian missiles denied

The U.S. Department of Defense said it has "no evidence whatsoever" that Iran acquired several nuclear warheads in the early 1990s from a former Soviet republic.

The statement came in response to a report in the Jerusalem Post that the warheads have been maintained by Russian experts. The report said the documents were authenticated by American experts and supported 1992 reports that Iran received up to four nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan. A Russian spokesman dismissed the reports as "nonsense." [Page 4]

### Cohen to visit Israel

U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen is slated to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem next week to discuss Israel's security needs.

During his six-day trip, Cohen is also scheduled to visit Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Greece.

### Israeli activists arrested

Israeli police arrested some 30 activists who tried to enter the West Bank town of Hebron to protest celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of Israel's return to the biblical city. Hundreds of other activists were prevented from reaching Hebron. Several Cabinet ministers and chief rabbis joined the estimated 20,000 Israelis who attended the celebration.

### End to 'war of words' urged

The Arab League called on Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to halt their "war of words."

The call came after Palestinian Authority security forces rounded up a number of Islamic fundamentalist leaders and university students amid continuing accusations and counter-accusations between the two bodies regarding the recent death of Hamas bomb-maker Mohiyedine Sharif. [Page 1]

### Report: Hamas gets Saudi gift

A leading member of Saudi Arabia's royal family presented the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas with \$25 million, sparking concerns that it would aid a terrorist campaign in Israel, according to a British newspaper. The Saudi benefactor was not named by the Sunday Times of London, but it is believed to be Crown Prince Abdullah, heir to the ailing King Fahd. [Page 2]

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Israelis wary as tensions among Palestinians escalate

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israelis are watching the escalating tensions between the Palestinian Authority and Islamic militants with apprehension and uncertainty, wondering how the rift will spill over.

On one hand, Israeli citizens remain on heightened alert for terrorist attacks after the fundamentalist group Hamas issued threats last week against Israeli targets.

At the same time, officials worry about how the internal struggle will affect diplomatic efforts to revive the dormant peace process.

The tensions date back to March 29, when the body of Hamas' chief bomb-maker, Mohiyedine Sharif, was found after an explosion in a garage in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Sharif was on Israel's list of most-wanted terrorists, and Hamas militants suspected that Israeli operatives were behind his death — just as they had been held responsible for the death of Yehiya Ayash, the Hamas bomb-maker known as "The Engineer."

Ayash was killed by a booby-trapped cellular phone in the Gaza Strip two years ago. The assertion by a Palestinian pathologist that Sharif had been shot dead some hours before the explosion tended to corroborate Hamas' suspicions.

And the fundamentalist movement vowed retribution against the Jewish state, despite the repeated denials from Israeli officials that they were behind the bomb-maker's death.

Then the Palestinian Authority of Yasser Arafat seemed to corroborate Israel's denials, asserting that Sharif had been killed by rivals within Hamas' military wing, Izz a-Din al-Kassam. To back up their assertions, Palestinian interrogators claimed they had extracted a confession from Amad Awadallah, brother of a leading Hamas terrorist, Adel Awadallah.

Amad Awadallah later issued a statement from his jail cell that his confession had been extracted under physical and mental duress.

Hamas, predictably, is propagating this denial vigorously. The militants have also gone a step further, accusing the head of the Palestinian Authority's secret security service, Jibril Rajoub, of direct responsibility for Sharif's murder — in cahoots, the organization claims, with Israel.

Amid these charges and countercharges, the Palestinian Authority began arresting such key Hamas political figures as Abdel Azziz al-Rantissi and Ibrahim Makadmeh. Palestinian officials also rounded up leading members of another militant movement, Islamic Jihad.

For their part, Israeli officials are watching these developments warily — and without much rejoicing over the Palestinians' open rift.

Some officials stress that for all their reservations about Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, they want him to beat back any challenge to his authority from the fundamentalist opposition, which is implacably opposed to any political accommodation with the Jewish state. Other officials are ambivalent because they believe Arafat's public confrontation with Hamas will have a diplomatic price tag.

According to this scenario, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will hardly be able to assert to U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who is due back in the Middle East next week for another round of shuttle diplomacy, that the Palestinian Authority is not doing its utmost to fight terror. Netanyahu has reiterated that there will be no progress

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel hails Irish accord

Israel welcomed the historic peace agreement for Northern Ireland. Calling the pact reached last Friday a "breakthrough," Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the agreement would hopefully end decades of bloodshed and terror in which "thousands of innocent people lost their lives."

### Syrian, Lebanese leaders meet

Syrian President Hafez Assad and Lebanese President Elias Hrawi met for the third time in a month to discuss Israel's latest offer for withdrawal, according to a news report. Israel recently said it would accept U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

### Jews gather at Western Wall

Thousands of Jews gathered at the Western Wall Plaza in Jerusalem for an annual blessing of Israelis believed to be descendants of priests who served in the First and Second Temples. In Jerusalem's Old City on Sunday, Christian pilgrims mixed with Jewish celebrants of Passover. Also Sunday, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem protested the deadlock in the Middle East peace process in his Easter sermon.

### Premier to make appeal in Poland

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to appeal to his Polish counterpart to honor a multimillion-dollar helicopter deal between Israel and the Polish army. The deal was initialed last October shortly before a change in the Polish government. Netanyahu is slated to visit Poland next week to take part in Holocaust remembrance activities.

### Israel burnt by cigar report

Israel will no longer buy cigars for visiting dignitaries. The announcement came after a report in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot that the government spends some \$40,000 a year for this purpose.



## Daily News Bulletin

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in the peace process without a firm Palestinian commitment to do this. But his demand will ring somewhat hollow as Arafat risks his own political support by confronting Hamas head-on and by appearing to be aligned with Israel against the fundamentalists in the matter of Sharif's death.

The Americans long ago adopted Arafat's claim that while he should be expected to apply a 100 percent effort in the fight against terror, he cannot be required to produce 100 percent success — just as the Israelis themselves were not able to achieve total success when they administered all of the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority's arrests of Hamas officials and its accusation that one top Hamas figure wantonly murdered another are impressive evidence, Arafat will surely argue, of his unwavering commitment in this realm.

Meanwhile, for Israelis, who have been keeping their guard up since Hamas began issuing its threats of retaliation, there is little sense they are benefitting from the internecine feud.

The Hamas threats issued in the days before Passover created a period of tension — for Israeli security personnel and civilians alike.

In the blazing heat of Passover week, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the beaches and the countryside, and the army and police have been stretched thin in an effort to provide at least minimal protection.

To help security officials, Israelis have been repeatedly called on to do their part by keeping an eye out for suspicious-looking people or objects.

Amid these fears of a terror attack, a leading member of the Saudi royal family has reportedly presented Hamas extremists with \$25 million.

The funds have sparked fears that they will be used to underwrite a major bombing campaign against Israel.

The Saudi benefactor was not named by the Sunday Times of London, which reported the development, but it is believed to be Crown Prince Abdullah, heir to the ailing Saudi King Fahd. Diplomatic sources in London regard the revelation as particularly disturbing because it is thought to be the most significant gift to Hamas by a senior official in Saudi Arabia.

The Sunday Times reported that the Ramallah faction of Hamas' military wing is planning a terrorist attack against at least one target in Israel within the next few weeks to avenge Sharif's death. In a strategy carefully calculated to deflect criticism from Arafat and to prevent a crackdown on Hamas, the Ramallah wing will absolve the main body of Hamas from responsibility by announcing that it had broken away and was operating independently, the paper reported, citing Palestinian sources.

The report also suggested that Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, currently receiving medical treatment in Saudi Arabia, attempted to head off the attack by warning that a renewed Hamas bombing campaign could ignite a civil war among Palestinians. His warning, however, was reportedly ignored by both Hamas leaders abroad and by young Hamas militants in the West Bank and Gaza.

While the bulk of the \$25 million Saudi gift has been earmarked for Hamas militants, some of it will reportedly fund Hamas social-welfare programs in the West Bank and Gaza that help generate grass-roots support for the organization.

The paper also reported that Hamas is investigating the possibility of investing some of the money in Britain, which is a haven for Islamic extremists from several Middle Eastern countries. □

(JTA correspondent Douglas Davis in London contributed to this report.)

## Dollar to become legal tender in Israel

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The dollar is expected to become legal currency in Israel in a matter of weeks.

Under a plan to liberalize the country's currency regulations, Israelis would be able to purchase any amount of dollars and use them in transactions, including the purchases of homes. They would be able to take out of the country any sum of money in any currency and would be able to open foreign bank accounts.

The liberalization would also allow Israelis to make unlimited investments abroad and end restrictions on the use of credit cards overseas. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Museum marks milestone

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum welcomed its 10 millionth visitor last week. The milestone came just two weeks prior to the museum's fifth anniversary.

### Church teaching criticized

Pope John Paul II's Easter message criticized the Christian teaching that Jews bear responsibility for the death of Jesus.

The pope also criticized the Israeli policy of building Jewish settlements in eastern Jerusalem, saying peace is being threatened by "dangerous political decisions."

A prayer read out by a speaker on Good Friday in the presence of the pope said it was not the Jews who were responsible for the crucifixion, but "all of us and each of us," and it decried the fact that Jews had been "crucified by us for so long" because of this false accusation.

### Croatia to seek extradition

Croatia said it would seek the extradition of an alleged Croatian Nazi who is living in Argentina.

Dinko Sakic was head of the Jasenovac concentration camp, where 500,000 people died, between 1942 and 1944.

### Brazilian Schindler cited in report

A Brazilian diplomat saved hundreds of French Jews during World War II, according to a Brazilian newspaper report.

Luis Martins de Souza Dantas, Brazil's ambassador to France during the Nazi occupation, defied his government's strict orders restricting visas to rich and famous Jews.

### Russian charges dropped against

Russian prosecutors dismissed charges of anti-Semitism brought against the governor of a southern region in the country.

Nikolai Kondratenko had been quoted earlier this year as making anti-Semitic remarks, including blaming Jews for Russia's economic problems.

### Blair expected to launch program

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to launch a British-Israel youth exchange program when he visits Israel over the weekend to mark the 50th anniversary of the state.

The program is the brainchild of the United Jewish Israel Appeal, Britain's major fund-raising organization for Israel. Under the plan, British youth will travel to Israel to assist immigrants and receive leadership training while working on volunteer programs in northern Israel.

## FBI issues terror alert in wake of Hamas threat

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The FBI has warned security personnel at major U.S. corporations to be on alert for terrorism attacks in the United States.

The move comes in response to recent threats by the Islamic militant group Hamas to attack Israeli and Jewish targets worldwide. Hamas has accused Israel of murdering Hamas bomb-maker Mohiyedine Sharif. Israel has denied any role, and the Palestinian Authority has blamed the killing on rival Hamas factions.

It is unclear why the alert, issued Saturday and not made public, was sent to U.S. corporations rather than other organizations.

Although Jewish organizations did not receive the advisory, officials at several leading organizations said they had been in contact with government security agencies about the threats.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said an assessment was made not to place Jewish organizations on a high level of alert.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, "We were made aware of the alert."

The FBI said in the advisory that it was "unaware of any specific threats" related to Hamas.

Foxman said the communication was simply part of the FBI's efforts to "expand their circle of alertness."

But terrorism expert Steven Emerson said the warning was far from routine. "They would not send out a letter like this if there was not concern," Emerson said.

The advisory that the FBI National Security Division issued was intended for corporate security professionals who have requested to receive national security advisories. The advisory, which the FBI asked not to be distributed to the media, was obtained by JTA. It states:

"To date, Hamas has not conducted a terrorist act outside of Israel, the Gaza Strip, or the West Bank."

However, it continues, "FBI investigations have revealed the presence of Hamas members and sympathizers in the United States." □

## Israel denies reports about gun-making plans

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel is denying reports that a government-owned weapons manufacturer plans to sidestep a Clinton administration ban and go ahead with plans to arm Americans with Uzis.

Israel Military Industries "has no intention and has made no decision" to produce modified assault weapons for sale in the United States, said Gadi Baltiansky, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

The Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported that the company intended to set up a plant in the United States to manufacture a civilian version of the Uzi submachine gun in a joint operation with an American manufacturer.

The modified Uzi was on a list of 58 types of assault weapons President Clinton banned through an executive order last week.

The news report said the Israeli manufacturer planned to get around the ban by sending the blueprints and parts to the United States for assembly.

Baltiansky said Israel Military Industries reached an agreement more than a year ago to cooperate with an American weapons manufacturer, O.F. Mossberg & Sons.

He provided no further details about the nature of the joint venture, saying only that it would help Israel Military Industries "to be more active in the United States."

"Obviously, they will do nothing which is against the law," he added.

Neither company returned phone calls for comment. □

## U.S. rejects Israeli report of Iranian nuclear weapons

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The debate over Russian involvement in Iran's military program is heating up once again.

The U.S. Defense Department said last week that it has "no evidence whatsoever" that Iran acquired several nuclear warheads in the early 1990s from a former Soviet republic. The statement came in response to a report in an Israeli newspaper that warheads supplied by Kazakhstan were maintained in Iran by Russian experts.

The Jerusalem Post report was based on Iranian government documents that contained high-level correspondence, including at least one that is reportedly signed by a senior Iranian intelligence official.

The documents appeared to support 1992 U.S. congressional reports that Iran received enriched uranium and four nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan with help from the Russian underworld, the Post reported. According to the Post, the documents were authenticated by American experts and were being studied by Israeli officials. A spokesman for the Russian government dismissed the Israeli newspaper report as "nonsense."

Meanwhile, three foreign citizens suspected of attempting to smuggle to Iran dual-purpose technology have been arrested in Moscow for allegedly selling 22 tons of steel that could be used to help make ballistic missiles. The steel would reportedly have been shipped to Iran via Azerbaijan using several Russian private companies. In an interview this week, Nikolai Kovalyov, director of the Federal Security Service, which is a successor to the Soviet-era KGB, said that his agency had recently foiled several attempts to smuggle dual-purpose technology to Iran.

Israel and the United States have repeatedly criticized Russia's nuclear ties to Iran. The United States has also denounced plans by Gazprom, a state-owned Russian oil monopoly, to develop oil fields in the Muslim state. □

## Bella Abzug wasn't the first; Jewish woman won in 1925

By Rebecca Segall

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Bella Abzug died last month, pundits and journalists alike agreed that the prominent feminist was the first Jewish congresswoman elected to office.

But a self-described "political history junkie" from Capitol Hill was dubious.

Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, consulted his library. He found "Women in Congress: 1917-1990" and began researching congresswomen with Jewish-sounding names. He contacted the library at the House of Representatives, and was ultimately led to the University of California at Berkeley's Western Jewish History Center, located in the Judah L. Magnes Memorial Library.

There he confirmed that one of those Jewish-sounding names — Florence Prag Kahn — was indeed a Jew.

Kahn, a Republican, was elected to Congress in 1925 to succeed her husband, who had died in office. She was subse-

quently re-elected six times to represent California's 4th Congressional District until she was defeated in 1936.

"I don't want to take credit away from Bella's remarkable career and her contribution to history," Forman said, noting that Abzug, who died March 31 at the age of 77, was the first woman elected in her own right without succeeding her husband.

"But," he added, "there is a very rich and wonderful story about Jewish participation in American politics which is often overlooked."

Forman said he became skeptical of last week's news reports for two reasons: Even in times of deep-seated anti-Semitism, there has been significant Jewish participation in politics; and many women were elected to Congress in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

"It is important to remember the pioneers — even if they were Republicans," he added. □

## Jewish heritage main obstacle to nominee for Russian premier

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Sergei Kiriyenko's Jewish ancestry has become the main obstacle to his winning approval as Russia's next prime minister.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said this week that his party would continue to oppose Kiriyenko's nomination because his father was Jewish.

The Communists are the largest faction in the 450-seat Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, which rejected Kiriyenko's nomination last Friday. President Boris Yeltsin quickly resubmitted Kiriyenko's name for approval and another vote is expected Friday.

The Communists and their leftist allies, who dominate the Duma, had initially said the 35-year-old Kiriyenko was too inexperienced to serve as premier.

But after Kiriyenko said in an interview that his father was Jewish, the nominee's heritage became the focus of the opposition.

Last week, ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky lashed out at Jews in an hourlong news conference during which he blamed Jews for starting World War II, provoking the Holocaust, sparking the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia — and destroying the country ever since.

The verbal assault on Jews by opposition leaders continued this week when Zyuganov said in a live television interview Sunday that ethnic Russians make up 85 percent of the country's population, but the government is "dominated" by minorities.

It was unclear whether his remarks were directed exclusively at Jews. But given the prominence of some Jews in the Yeltsin administration, it is unlikely that he was excluding Jews from his attack. Zyuganov called for "proportional representation" of various nationalities in the government and made it clear that one of the reasons why Kiriyenko could not win Communists' approval was his Jewish heritage.

Despite the strong opposition in the Duma, many observers think Kiriyenko has a good chance for approval because Yeltsin is unlikely to back down and offer another nominee — and lawmakers are unlikely to provoke new elections.

Yeltsin has the power under the Russian Constitution to dissolve the Duma if his nominee is not approved. □