



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Kurds attack Israeli consulates

Kurdish protesters attempted to storm the Israeli consulates in Berlin and Montreal over the weekend, but were kept back by local police.

In Berlin, the demonstrators shouted, "Israeli murderers," protesting the shooting deaths of three Kurds who broke into the consulate there last week. In Montreal, a police officer was seriously wounded and 14 people were arrested when demonstrators tried to charge the Israeli Consulate.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon insisted that Israel has maintained "long, continuous, friendly relations" with the Kurdish people.

Peres addresses JCPA

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres called for the establishment of a Palestinian state during a speech before the more than 1,000 delegates gathered for the annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

"We shouldn't postpone it," Peres told the enthusiastic delegates. His speech kicked off the three-day conference in Washington, which is scheduled to include a speech later this week by Vice President Al Gore.

Tauber receives nomination

Joel Tauber, a Detroit businessman and longtime Jewish leader, was nominated to serve as the first chairman of the executive of the national entity to be formed from the union of the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal.

Tauber, a past president and chairman of UJA, will assume office beside recently named Chairman of the Board Charles Bronfman upon approval by the new entity's board of trustees. A chief professional officer is expected to be nominated within weeks.

U.S. seeks help for Jordan

The Clinton administration asked Congress for \$300 million in extra U.S. aid for Jordan. The bulk of the three-year package, proposed by Clinton immediately following King Hussein's death, would be set aside for the military but would also provide cash to shore up Jordan's budget and help Hussein's successor, King Abdullah, guide the country through its economic troubles.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Lebanese workers in Israel fear a withdrawal of forces

By Gil Sedan

METULLA, Israel (JTA) — Every morning before sunrise, Ehud Neustadt, a farmer from this small town at one of Israel's northernmost points, travels to pick up eight workers at the Lebanese border.

The workers, residents of southern Lebanon, are an indispensable part of the operations at Neustadt's apple orchard.

"I am very dependent on them," the 58-year-old Neustadt told JTA at the end of a recent day's work.

"It will be difficult to replace them."

There is good reason why Neustadt has to consider the possibility of finding replacements: In the 14 years since Israel created the border security zone in southern Lebanon, discussion within Israeli society about a possible withdrawal has reached a fever pitch.

Neustadt is concerned about maintaining his farm. But the debate within Israel has his workers gravely concerned about their future.

The workers on Neustadt's farm, like so many of those who live within the security zone but who work in Israel, consider themselves proud citizens of Lebanon.

Just the same, the last thing they want to see is an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

"Israel has been there for me ever since I can remember," said one of Neustadt's workers, who like most of the Lebanese interviewed preferred to remain anonymous.

"I cannot imagine a situation without Israel."

These workers know full well that in the event of a withdrawal, they may have to pay a very painful price.

Having linked their fate to the Israeli enemy, they are considered traitors by many of their fellow Lebanese.

Indeed the workers' views contrast strongly with the official view of the Lebanese government, which has called for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The Iranian-backed militant Hezbollah has gone further, launching a war of attrition against Israeli targets in the region.

The latest fighting occurred this week, with Hezbollah gunmen attacking an Israeli outpost. The Israelis responded with a series of air strikes against a suspected Hezbollah base.

Some 2,500 Lebanese make their living in Israel, about 1,000 of them in Metulla and the neighboring Israeli settlements in the Upper Galilee.

Without work in Israel, they say, they will starve. As a result, they ignore the warnings from Beirut not to cooperate with the Israelis.

The talk of survival seems completely incongruous here in Metulla, one of the most beautiful spots in Israel.

The picturesque town lies on a hill overlooking Lebanon to the north and Israel's fertile Hula Valley and the Sea of Galilee to the south.

The town has two main streets and a few sides streets — all of which are reminiscent of villages in Russia and Poland before World War II.

A mixture of antiquated homes and modern villas, the town is surrounded by fertile fields and orchards.

The town also has tourist attractions — a huge sports arena, with an ice-skating rink

MIDEAST FOCUS

Haredim protest supermarket

Fervently Orthodox Israelis protested outside the first supermarket in Jerusalem to open for business on the Sabbath.

At one point, a fistfight broke out between two demonstrators and one of the owners of "Drugstore 2000." Some 100 restaurants, convenience stores and clubs already operate in Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

Haredi leader will not face probe

Israel's attorney general decided against ordering a criminal investigation into the leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party.

Just the same, Elyakim Rubinstein said he had been shocked by recent comments that Rabbi Ovadia Yosef had made against the Supreme Court.

In a televised interview earlier this month, Yosef lashed out at what he felt were the anti-religious rulings of the court and called the justices "oppressors of Jews."

Israeli police arrest Chasidic man

Israeli police arrested a member of a New York Chasidic community wanted by U.S. officials on charges of defrauding the federal and state governments out of millions of dollars.

Chaim Berger, who was indicted in 1997 along with six others by a federal grand jury, was arrested in response to a formal request submitted to Israel by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Four of the others were convicted recently on the fraud charges. Two other defendants remain fugitives.

Arafat meets with pope

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat met with Pope John Paul II and renewed his invitation for the pontiff to visit Bethlehem in the year 2000.

As he has before, the pope accepted the invitation, saying, "I hope I can be there." But no date was set.



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and an Olympic swimming pool that was contributed by Canada's Jewish community. Indeed, Metulla is a peaceful town — except for the Israeli army trucks and soldiers that occasionally make their way through here to what is Israel's last active battlefield.

Residents like Neustadt, who was born and raised here, are concerned that an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon may turn this lovely spot into a fortified border town.

But he is also concerned for the fate of his workers and their families.

"I hate to think what will happen to them if we withdraw. It will be a second Sabra and Shatilla," he said, referring to the two refugee camps in Beirut that were the target of a massacre by Christian militias during Israel's war in Lebanon.

Israel created the nine-mile-wide security zone in southern Lebanon in 1985, when most Israeli troops withdrew at the end of that three-year war.

Some 55 percent of the buffer zone's 200,000 residents are Shi'ite Muslims, 25 percent Christians and 10 percent Druse, a sect that is an offshoot of Islam.

Israel has gotten the majority of its support from the Christian population, which forms the backbone of the South Lebanon Army, the Jewish state's militia ally in the region.

The security zone was created to protect Israel's northern communities from attacks by Hezbollah gunmen.

But the continually rising death toll of Israeli soldiers, coupled with periodic Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israeli communities, has repeatedly prompted the question of whether — and how — to end Israel's involvement in Lebanon.

Intimately linked to this debate is the question of how to deal with Syria, which, with tens of thousands of soldiers in Lebanon, is the undisputed power broker there.

In 1998 alone, more than 20 Israeli soldiers were killed in Lebanon — most of them by Hezbollah's latest weapon of choice, the roadside bomb.

Among the most vocal opponents of the present policy in Lebanon is an organization called the Four Mothers, a grass-roots group of mothers of Israeli soldiers serving in the security zone.

Among Israeli politicians, support for — and opposition to — the policy in Lebanon cuts across party lines.

Last year, Israel approved in principle Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged Lebanon to enter negotiations over the withdrawal, an offer the Lebanese rejected outright.

As the internal Israeli debate rages, the Lebanese workers continue to worry.

"I am very concerned about the future," said a woman from the Christian village of Kleiah, a few miles north of the Israeli-Lebanese border.

"Nothing can happen without the approval of Syria. I can only hope for peace with Syria."

The woman, who has worked for the past 12 years as a maid in a Metulla home, has no doubt about what she wants to do if Israeli soldiers leave the region.

"If the Israelis decide on withdrawal, we go out with the soldiers," she said.

Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, perhaps the most outspoken champion of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal, has suggested that Israel give safe haven to the members of the South Lebanon Army until a full peace agreement is reached between the two countries.

Beilin is aware that Israel will have to care for many in southern Lebanon's general population.

"The most moral thing I can say is to let them stay with us," said Beilin. "But it is certainly immoral for us to continue staying there because of them."

Neustadt's orchard worker says he would certainly seek to cross the border with withdrawing Israeli troops.

He said he dreams of marrying a Druse woman from an Arab town near Haifa and becoming an Israeli citizen.

He doesn't want to contemplate the fate that may await him in his native land in the aftermath of an Israeli withdrawal.

He just wants to live. □

JEWISH WORLD

Bomb blast near Israeli mission

Two people were injured last Friday when a bomb exploded in a car near the Israeli Embassy in Moscow. It remained unclear whether the embassy was a target, although the Israeli Foreign Ministry said it was not. Israeli embassies have been the target of protests following Turkey's arrest of Kurdish nationalist leader Abdullah Ocalan last week.

Peace talks site has looted art

The French palace at Rambouillet where the Kosovo peace talks are being held contains works of art that were looted by the Nazis and never returned to their rightful owners, according to the World Jewish Congress.

The WJC said it had discovered the artworks were in the palace by matching up several French government reports on some 2,000 such works placed in French care after the war and never returned.

Russian victims offered payments

Germany's chancellor discussed compensation for Russian victims of the Nazis during a meeting with President Boris Yeltsin. The Holocaust-era victims should seek payments from a fund created last week by 12 leading German firms, Gerhard Schroeder said during a visit to Moscow. Meanwhile, Commerzbank, Germany's fifth largest bank, said it would also contribute to the fund.

Rabbis to help agunot

A group of Orthodox rabbis in Australia and New Zealand unanimously agreed to adopt measures to alleviate the plight of Jewish women who are unable to receive a Jewish divorce. The Organization of Rabbis of Australasia agreed on a number of steps, including communal sanctions, against husbands who refuse to cooperate in the religious divorce process.

Sydney rabbi assaulted

Two teen-agers were charged with assaulting a rabbi in Sydney, Australia. Rabbi Avraham Gutnick, a brother of mining magnate Rabbi Joseph Gutnick, suffered a concussion and needed 23 stitches on his face after allegedly being assaulted by the teens. The youths allegedly attacked Gutnick after he ordered them to leave the Yeshiva Gedola Rabbinical College in Sydney.

Holocaust films shown in Berlin

Four films set during the Holocaust era are appearing at the Berlin Film festival. Among them are "The Girl of Your Dreams," a comedy from Spain, and "Aimee and Jaguar," a lesbian love story that opened the festival. The two stars of "Aimee and Jaguar" shared the festival's best actress award.

American Jews convene group in Israel to advocate for pluralism

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly 20 religiously liberal and secular American Jewish organizations have joined forces and formed a new group to fight for religious freedom in Israel.

The North American Coalition for the Advancement of Religious Freedom in Israel gave itself a name and drafted its first mission statement in a meeting Saturday evening in Jerusalem. The group now plans to draw up a strategy to boost public awareness on pluralism issues both in Israel and the Diaspora.

"We do not believe that the State of Israel is an Orthodox synagogue," said Philip Meltzer, president of the Association of Reform Zionists of America and one of the group's founders. "We believe that the State of Israel should be open to all Jews."

Participants were in Jerusalem for the annual leadership mission of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. They insisted the meeting had nothing to do with the conference, which steers clear of divisive religious issues to maintain unity in the umbrella organization.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the conference, said he was informed of the meeting, which took place outside the framework of the mission.

The coalition includes major Jewish organizations from the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, as well as non-religious organizations such as Na'amat, the New Israel Fund and the National Council of Jewish Women. Some moderate Orthodox organizations were asked to join but declined.

"We want to be as inclusive as possible, and we would be thrilled if moderate Orthodox groups join," said Nan Rich, president of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Rich also said the importance of the new coalition is the inclusion of non-religious groups. "Our agenda is different than that of religious organizations," she said. "We felt that groups like ours can offer a different perspective from faith-based organizations."

According to its mission statement, the group is basing its campaign on Israel's Declaration of Independence, which promises equality and freedom of religion to all.

"Jews in America and Israel have begun to work together in new ways on issues of common concern, which will be critical to the future of Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people," said the statement. "Central to these concerns is the ongoing struggle for full freedom of religion for Jews in Israel."

The coalition said the Orthodox monopoly in Israel over religious affairs including marriage, divorce, conversion and burial, must be changed to allow "full religious expression and worship for all streams of Judaism at public religious sites such as the Western Wall."

Several meetings were held in the United States before Saturday's session. The coalition is now setting up a steering committee and deciding on how member groups will provide funding. □

L.A. campus of HUC to ordain rabbis

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Hebrew Union College's Los Angeles campus will begin ordaining Reform rabbis.

The move to expand the school's rabbinic training program, which was authorized here by HUC's governing board, puts the Los Angeles campus on a par with HUC's three other schools, in Cincinnati, New York and Jerusalem.

In its unanimous decision, the governing board noted "the burgeoning significance of the Reform movement in the Western states and the growing number of West Coast Reform congregations and schools seeking professional and spiritual leadership."

HUC established its Los Angeles campus in 1954. The Cincinnati and New York campuses last year ordained 67 rabbis, who joined 1,700 Reform rabbis already active in North America. □

Jewish leaders disappointed with European stance on Israel

By Douglas Davis

BRUSSELS (JTA) — American Jewish leaders have emerged with a deep sense of disappointment from a series of meetings here with European Union officials.

During last week's meetings, a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations attempted to get the E.U. officials to address a long-standing suspicion that the Europeans have a distinct tilt toward the Palestinian Authority at the expense of Israel.

The chairman of the Presidents Conference, Melvin Salberg, later described the meetings with the European officials as "very frank."

"We left our meetings with a clear understanding that there is disagreement between us," he added.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference, said the delegation was "disappointed by the unresponsiveness of the Europeans on the specific issues we raised."

A past chairman of the umbrella group, Lester Pollack, sounded a similar note of discontent.

"There is a disconnect between the [Europeans'] desire to be fair-minded and the reality in punishing Israel for political reasons," he said.

E.U. Commissioner Manuel Marin, Europe's point-man on Middle East issues, told the delegation that Europe is "not pro-Palestinian — it is pro-peace."

But that struck many of the Americans as somewhat disingenuous, given their perception that Europe measures the success of the peace process according to the amount of territory Israel is willing to cede — giving no attention to Palestinian violations of already signed accords.

Ambassador Miguel Moratinos, the European Union's special envoy to the Middle East, acknowledged that "some of you have the impression that Europe is anti-Israel" and sought to calm the American delegates.

"We have to create a new Palestinian society that really believes in peace," he said. "We have to build a new Palestinian generation that embraces the culture of peace."

While the European Union is the largest foreign donor to the Palestinian Authority, its most senior officials react defensively when challenged about rampant corruption in the self-rule government — a charge against Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and his colleagues that has been levied even by members of the Palestinian legislative council.

European officials explain this corruption away as inexperience and then swiftly blame Israeli policy for Palestinian impoverishment.

They agree that the culture of incitement and violence in Palestinian political life is regrettable, but they imply that this is a product of Israeli non-compliance with the Wye agreement.

Further, they warn that unless Israel is more forthcoming in delivering territory, it may result in an explosion of Islamic extremism.

Attitudes toward Israel are not always uniform within the 15-member European Union, where national rivalries for trade and

diplomatic advantage — particularly between Britain and France — sometimes transcend collective solidarity.

But the unmistakable buzzword in the European Union is "harmonization."

Just as a new single currency — the euro — was introduced at the beginning of the year, the 15 member-states now aspire to a single voice on foreign affairs.

Given the current divergence of national interests, that could be some way off.

Even without it, however, Europe is a growing political and diplomatic powerhouse. And E.U. leaders are making an increasingly insistent demand for a central role alongside the United States in Middle East diplomacy.

The American Jewish leaders accurately identified this trend — and in their meetings last week, they made it clear that European attitudes toward the peace process can no longer be ignored. □

Palestinian asks U.S. Jews to press Netanyahu on peace

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Saeb Erekat, the Palestinians' chief peace negotiator, urged visiting American Jewish leaders on Sunday to help revive the stalled peace talks by passing a message on to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Send him this message on my behalf," Erekat said in an impassioned speech to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "Palestinian people are not your enemies, and they should not be portrayed as the enemy."

Erekat also urged Netanyahu not to use Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in his election campaign: "Stop insinuating to the Israelis that if you don't vote Netanyahu you are voting Arafat."

A moderate in the Palestinian leadership, Erekat said accusing the Palestinian people of not being committed to peace strengthens extremist elements in Palestinian society, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

"Please, Mr. Netanyahu, don't shoot yourself in the foot and shoot us in the head," he said. "You can say whatever you want to say about Arafat, about me as a chief negotiator. You can accuse us of anything you want. But don't touch the Palestinian people."

"If you continue to portray the Palestinian people as the enemies," he said, "this is [used as] the main ammunition of Hamas and Islamic Jihad."

Erekat was warmly received by most members of the Conference of Presidents, which was in Israel on its annual leadership mission.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the conference's executive vice chairman, said after the speech that the plea to American Jews was "a little bit of drama."

"We are not intermediaries to the prime minister," he said, adding that Erekat "presented the traditional position of the Palestinian Authority. He was very articulate."

However, Hoenlein said Erekat failed to give specific answers to some concerns about Palestinian compliance with the Wye accords signed last October but subsequently frozen by the Israeli government.

Erekat was also ambiguous when asked if Arafat plans to carry out his threat of unilaterally declaring statehood May 4. □