



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 182

Thursday, September 30, 1999

82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Levy addresses U.N. on Syria

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy urged Syria on Wednesday to resume negotiations for a bilateral peace treaty.

"Enough hesitation. It is time to talk," Levy said during an address to the U.N. General Assembly. "Meetings and discussions are not political sacrifices. They are basic necessities."

As Levy spoke, President Clinton was meeting Syria's foreign minister in an effort to revive Israeli-Syrian talks.

Religion-at-work law introduced

Senate lawmakers introduced legislation on Wednesday to provide greater protections for religious employees in the workplace.

The Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which has the support of every major Jewish group and a range of other religious organizations, would require employers to accommodate the religious observances of their employees, including Jews who observe the Sabbath, provided that it does not impose an "undue hardship" on the employer.

Foxman blasts Baptists — again

The head of the Southern Baptist Convention defended his group's call to followers to pray for the conversion of Jews during the High Holidays.

Responding to a letter from the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Rev. Paige Patterson insisted on "absolute religious liberty" for both Jews and Baptists.

In a second letter to Patterson this week, ADL director Abraham Foxman denounced as "theological arrogance" Patterson's insistence on the group's right to seek Jewish converts.

Iraqis criticize papal trip

Iraq's official news agency published a letter written by seven Iraqi scholars criticizing a planned papal trip to Iraq.

In what is believed to be the first criticism to emerge from Iraq regarding the trip, the news agency reported Tuesday that the scholars believe Pope John Paul II will use the pilgrimage, planned to coincide with next year's millennial celebrations, to persuade Christians to forgive Jews for "atrocities" that included the killing of Jesus.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Kidnappings illustrate danger for Jews in Russian Caucasus

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Yuri Izmailov, a well-known member of the Jewish community in the capital of Dagestan, was kidnapped last winter and held near the border with the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

The reason: His captors wanted to receive ransom money from his relatives or sell him into slavery to Chechens.

After six months of living in a basement, eating only bread and water and sleeping on a dirt floor, Izmailov, 45, knew he had to take action.

He managed to dig an underground passageway and escape onto the street, walking away unsuspected only, he believes, because his six-month-old beard made people think he was one of the Wahabbites, a local radical Muslim group.

But that wasn't the end of trouble for Izmailov or his family, which before his escape had managed to bargain the ransom price down to \$50,000.

A family celebration of his escape was interrupted by two armed men who burst into their house. The ensuing shooting left several dead and others, including Izmailov, badly wounded.

Izmailov again managed to survive and shortly thereafter, the entire family left the city of Makhachkala, the Dagestani capital, with some going to Israel.

Jewish kidnappings in the Caucasus have become more frequent in the past year — some 15 to 20 Jews are currently being held in the Makhachkala region alone, according to Karen Gurshumov, a leader of the local Jewish community.

As the kidnappings show, the situation of the Jews in the predominantly Muslim republics of Russia's northern Caucasus is rather precarious.

They come at a time of growing instability and escalating conflict in the region. Chechen rebels have twice invaded neighboring Dagestan and are widely blamed for terrorist bombings that have killed hundreds in Moscow and southern Russia. Chechen leaders say their goal is to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state in the region.

The situation contrasts sharply with the climate prior to the rule of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, when the anti-Semitism familiar to Jews in most of Russia was virtually non-existent in this region. The context began to deteriorate in 1989, when the rapid changes in Soviet society caused by Gorbachev's policies of perestroika led to a sharp surge of nationalism mixed with strong Islamic sentiments.

Anti-Zionist and explicitly anti-Semitic slogans and speeches were heard at mass rallies in Makhachkala, Derbent and other towns in Dagestan.

The increase of anti-Semitism spurred many local Jews to leave the area where their ancestors had lived for at least 12 centuries. Most left for Israel or resettled in Moscow and other cities in Russia. Fewer made their way to the United States.

The anti-Semitic rhetoric has escalated in the past year.

Shamil Basayev, a warlord from neighboring Chechnya who has been leading the recent attacks by Islamic rebels in Dagestan, has employed anti-Zionist rhetoric to explain his goals.

"I'm going to fight against Zionism and purge Dagestan, driving out the Yeltsin regime, faithful servant of world Zionism," he was quoted as saying at a mass rally in Chechnya a few weeks ago.

Aslan Maskhadov, president of the self-proclaimed Chechen republic, has made similar comments. The latest reports from Dagestani Jewish centers indicate that a new

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annun to block U.N. moves

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said the secretary-general of the United Nations promised to use his influence to prevent the adoption of anti-Israel U.N. resolutions while the peace process proceeds.

After meeting with Kofi Annan on Tuesday, Levy said Annan also agreed that the peace process "must continue directly between the sides involved" without international intervention, which can "disturb the process."

Paper: Russian mob halts efforts

The change of government in Israel halted efforts by Russian organized crime to get close to Israeli officials, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Wednesday. The paper cited police reports that these efforts "ripened" during the government of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Senior police officials were quoted as saying that since the arrest and conviction in Israel of Gregory Lerner, considered a senior figure in Russian organized crime, mob activities in Israel dropped sharply because it was no longer considered an address for money laundering and smuggling.

Towels returned for Yom Kippur

An Israeli woman decided as part of her atonement for Yom Kippur to return items she stole from a hotel near the Dead Sea.

"I decided to return all that I took because we became religious, and we are sorry for those acts," the woman wrote in a letter to the Nirvana Hotel, days before Yom Kippur.

As part of her atonement, she returned to the hotel silverware, towels and a bathrobe she had taken before checking out.

After an Israeli newspaper chronicled the woman's story, two other former guests at the hotel decided to make similar gestures. The hotel said it would not prosecute the individuals.

outburst of war — an invasion of Dagestani territory by Chechen fighters and Islamic fundamentalists, followed by a massive operation of Russian federal troops inside Chechnya — could be drawing near.

Jewish activists there say that many of the 12,000 remaining Jews are preparing to pull out of Dagestan, heading for Israel or for relatives in Moscow, and that houses and apartments are being sold for a nominal price or simply abandoned.

Meanwhile, the area in which the kidnappings are taking place is widening.

Two main factors explain the phenomenon.

First, as a result of the growing instability and weakening of the Russian state, the traditional clan system has resurfaced in the Caucasus region.

Since the Mountain Jews, as they are known, are fewer in number than before, they have become easy prey for extortion and kidnapping in what has become a popular profession in this poorest part of Russia.

Second, there exists a deeply rooted belief that the worldwide Jewish community, and, above all the State of Israel, would never forsake their fellow Jews and would rush to help pay any ransom that the kidnappers demand.

These cases are usually not reported by mass media, with the only scant information emanating from local Jewish sources.

The kidnappers are believed to be particularly on the lookout for Israelis visiting the region.

In July, Laura Likhtman, 18, came from Israel to spend a month with her grandmother and her sister, currently living in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkariya, another autonomous republic inside Russia near Chechnya.

In Nalchik, Likhtman saw a girl, one of her former schoolmates.

The girl called Likhtman to tell her that her boyfriend would pick her up in his car. The young man, an ethnic Chechen, indeed picked her up — and then disappeared with her. Likhtman's relatives later received a call demanding a ransom of \$1 million for her return.

The ransom has since been reduced to \$100,000.

During his visit to Moscow in early August, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak raised the issue of the kidnappings in his talks with Sergei Stepashin, his Russian counterpart.

Likhtman's whereabouts are still not known.

A spokesman with the Israeli Embassy in Moscow declined to speak about the issue. □

Minneapolis uses Sukkot exhibit to highlight the city's housing crisis

By Jeannine Mercer

NEW YORK (JTA) — Minneapolis is using the fragile huts associated with the ancient festival of Sukkot to draw attention to a modern political and social issue — a lack of affordable housing in the city.

During Sukkot, Jews express gratitude for God's abundance and for the comforts of home while reflecting on the temporary homes in which their ancestors dwelled during their wandering in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt.

"Since the sukkot are temporary houses, we felt that this is a metaphor for our current housing crisis in the Twin Cities metro area," said Susan Jacobson, the director of public programs at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which is sponsoring the Sukkot project.

With the help of several local Jewish agencies, the institute is providing a forum to raise the issue of social injustice in access to affordable housing.

Although the museum is primarily showcasing six models of sukkot throughout the city that were designed by local architects and artists, it is also providing information about the Jewish holiday, and tour guides tell visitors that Sukkot is a holiday of charity and justice for the poor and homeless.

"This is quite unique," Jacobson said. "Not only has this never been done in Minneapolis, it's never been done anywhere." □



Daily News Bulletin

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

Israeli security issues warnings on final-status talks, report says

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service has reportedly cautioned Israel's leaders against driving too hard a bargain with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the final-status talks.

Achieving an agreement that is "better than strictly necessary" for the Jewish state "may play against us in the future," Shin Bet officials say in a secret five-page memorandum to Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

"The agreement would look good for Israel, but it would not be durable and solid."

A copy of the memorandum, "The Palestinians: Room for Maneuver Toward the Final Status," was acquired by the London-based newsletter Foreign Report, which plans to publish its key points this week.

Barak is said to have endorsed the memorandum's "secret recommendations" for handling final-status talks. The memo says that Arafat is flexible and will give up some Palestinian demands if Israel accepts an independent Palestinian state and withdraws from most of the West Bank.

Other key points from the memorandum's recommendations regarding Israeli negotiating positions include:

- **Jerusalem.** "All Palestinians think Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian State which is to be formed." If Arafat fails to achieve a satisfactory agreement on Jerusalem, the memo says, Hamas may attempt to seize the Palestinian leadership.

But while acknowledging the gap between Israeli and Palestinian positions, the memorandum suggests there is room to maneuver.

The boundary of Jerusalem recognized by the Palestinians, it points out, is larger than the area recognized by the Israelis, and the Palestinians' capital could be set up in an area they consider to be part of the city but the Israelis do not.

- **The West Bank.** "Arafat believes that holding onto the formula of asking for 'all of Palestine' will jeopardize his chances of achieving partial Palestinian sovereignty."

- **Settlements.** "Arafat will start off with a strong demand for a total evacuation of all settlements, but as he knows this will be a non-starter for the Israelis and would mark the end of the process, we can expect flexibility on his behalf about this matter.

"We believe that the idea of exchanging territories will help Arafat to swallow the bitter pill of settlements remaining."

Moreover, it suggests, Israel could remain in some areas through a lease-back arrangement with the Palestinians.

- **Palestinian refugees.** While Arafat always insists on the refugees' "right of return," it is likely that he would be prepared to convince his constituency abroad to accept compensation for their property and give up their dreams of going home.

- **Palestinian sovereignty.** "We can identify among Palestinians a growing tolerance of ambiguity regarding the achievement of sovereignty," the memorandum says. "We think the Palestinians now believe there is more than one way to implement it." Arafat realizes that in the future he will depend on both Israel and Jordan, the memo adds.

The Palestinian aspiration to sovereignty "clashes with geopolitical reality," the memo contends.

"The Palestinians have a vital interest in maintaining the pattern of a special relationship with Jordan," it says. "Arafat wants the Palestinians in Jordan to feel they enjoy full citizenship. But he will not ask the refugees to move to the new Palestine, which will be too small to accommodate them.

"Although Arafat will announce his independence, the geopolitical situation will force him to depend on his neighbors. Arafat will have no other choice than to opt for a confederation with Jordan.

"That is why we recommend that the initiative for a confederation with Jordan should be a Palestinian initiative and, for tactical reasons, Israel should not mention this idea under any circumstances." □

U.S. urged to pay U.N. dues

Religious groups joined with members of Congress in calling on President Clinton and Congress to pay the U.S. debt to the United Nations.

A letter sent by the Emergency Coalition for U.S. Financial Support of the U.N., which includes several Jewish organizations, warns that as the world's biggest debtor to the United Nations, to which it owes more than \$1 billion in past dues, the United States is undermining its "ability to promote democratic values and ensure universal human rights."

Anne Frank drawing on display

Newly discovered photos of movie stars and a drawing of a little girl done by Anne Frank, found in the Dutch teen-ager's attic, are featured in the new educational wing of the Anne Frank House.

In the wing, which is part of a 10-year, \$10 million renovation of the house in Amsterdam, visitors can also take a virtual tour of the history of the house where Frank hid with her family during World War II.

Outreach venture finds new digs

An outreach venture for New York's 20- and 30-something Jews is celebrating its move into an \$11 million Upper West Side home this week with a series of concerts and parties.

An amalgamation of coffeehouse, bar, cinema, gallery and house of study, Makor bills itself as "New York's newest center for culture" and is designed to serve as a model for engaging the age group that studies say is least likely to participate in Jewish life.

Primarily funded by philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, Makor, Hebrew for "source," also has the financial backing of film director Steven Spielberg.

Panel to hear war crimes case

Lawyers for B'nai Brith Canada are scheduled to appear Friday before an international tribunal in Washington to argue that the Canadian government has not adequately prosecute war criminals.

B'nai Brith officials say they plan to embarrass the Canadian government before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by showing that Canada has violated its agreement to uphold the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.

B'nai Brith raised a complaint with the tribunal after Canada acquitted Imre Finta in 1989 on charges of confining thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II and sending them to concentration camps, on the grounds that he was merely following orders.

Noting that no war criminal has been successfully prosecuted in Canada since the Finta case failed, B'nai Brith and other Jewish groups assert that new war crimes legislation is needed in Canada.

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Jordan gets tough on Hamas,
but extent of crackdown unclear***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After years of tolerating Hamas activities in Amman, Jordanian officials have clamped down on the Islamic fundamentalist group.

The move has sparked accusations from Hamas officials that Jordan's King Abdullah was doing the bidding of Israeli officials — a claim roundly denied by both Israel and Jordan.

While it is true that Israel has exerted pressure on Jordan to put the squeeze on Hamas operations in Amman ever since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, Israeli officials this week were quick to repudiate the Hamas claims.

"We did not exert any pressure," Ephraim Sneh, Israel's deputy minister of defense, told JTA. "In my opinion, Abdullah took the restrictive measures against Hamas because he re-evaluated the situation and reached the conclusion that this was the right thing to do under the existing circumstances."

According to Sneh and other Israeli officials, Abdullah was concerned that if he refrains from acting against Hamas now, the militant group may grow strong enough to give him the same troubles the PLO had given his father, King Hussein, 29 years ago, during the Black September riots in which 2,000 people were killed during clashes between the Jordanian army and PLO fighters.

Nachman Tal, who until three years ago was a high-ranking official with Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service, wrote in his newly published book, "Islamic Fundamentalism," that Abdullah would maintain the same relations with Hamas that had marked the reign of his father.

This week, Tal told JTA that the recent Jordanian crackdown against Hamas had caught him by surprise.

Ever since Abdullah ascended the throne after Hussein's death in February, he had adopted a policy of rapprochement with the wider Arab world — particularly with Syria, which experienced strained relations with Jordan during Hussein's reign.

According to Tal, it would have been only natural for Abdullah to maintain the status quo with the Islamic fundamentalists and perhaps even improve relations with them.

But Abdullah had no such plans. On Aug. 30, Jordanian officials shut down the offices of Hamas in Amman, arrested dozens of followers and issued arrest warrants for three of its leaders, Khaled Mashaal, Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook and Ibrahim Ghosheh. The three were in Tehran when the warrants were issued. When they returned to Amman last week, they were promptly arrested. One of them, Marzook, was soon deported.

The case histories of Mashaal and Marzook illustrate Jordan's dramatic change in policy toward Hamas.

In September 1997, Jordan's relations with Israel were severely strained after two Mossad agents were apprehended by Jordanian authorities after attempting to inject Mashaal with a fatal poison. As part of the price for securing the two agents' release from Jordan, Hussein got Israel to free the spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

Marzook, who was the head of Hamas' political wing, had lived in the United States for 15 years before he was detained at a New York airport in July 1995 because his name was on a list of

suspected terrorists. Israel had asked for his extradition to bring him to justice for his alleged role in 10 terrorist attacks between 1990 and 1994 that took 47 lives.

After his arrest, Marzook remained in a New York jail while his lawyers fought the Israeli request. In April 1997, Israel decided to drop its extradition request — apparently fearing that putting Marzook on trial would provoke Palestinian violence.

The next month, Hussein agreed to take in Marzook, who operated freely until Abdullah had the arrest warrants issued.

Marzook has now found safe haven in Damascus, where Syrian officials harbor several Palestinian groups which, like Hamas, oppose the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and call for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Marzook was quoted Monday as saying he expected that he would soon be able to return to Amman, adding that he believed there would be a "breakthrough" to reverse the crackdown.

Tal also suggested that the crackdown may be short lived.

"It is too early to tell whether Abdullah will go all the way against Hamas," he said. "It is still likely that in two weeks or so, Abdullah will release the prisoners."

Hamas has prospered in Jordan since the beginning of this decade, when Israeli officials detained, killed or deported many of its members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Hamas moved many of its operations to Jordan, which was a natural choice for the militants, given the fact that some 3 million Palestinians — or more than two-thirds of the total population — live in the Hashemite Kingdom.

Over the years, Amman became the back door for Hamas activities in the territories. During the past five years, Hamas raised a reported \$70 million for its radical activities against Israel.

Even prior to Jordan's peace agreement with Israel, Hussein had banned Hamas from initiating terror inside Israel. The restrictions became even tighter after the agreement was signed.

While Hamas officials in Jordan promised to meet Hussein's demands, it was often an agreement more honored in the breach than in the observance. The Hamas headquarters in Amman supervised the military training of terrorists and transferred money and military equipment into Israel.

In what was the latest breach, Hamas operatives in Jordan were behind an attack earlier this month in which a group of Israeli Arabs attempted to carry out bombings in Haifa and Tiberias.

The bombs apparently exploded prematurely, killing three of the attackers and seriously wounding an Israeli female passer-by.

The Jordanian crackdown on Hamas offices in Amman took place several days before the botched bombings.

But after it became clear that the Israeli Arabs were taking their orders from Hamas operatives in Jordan, Abdullah apparently became more firm in his resolve to arrest Mashaal, Marzook and Ghosheh if and when they returned from Iran.

Officials in Amman said the crackdown had not come in the wake of pressure from Israel or the United States. The crackdown was a "sovereign decision taken by the Jordanian government," according to the deputy prime minister, Ayman Majali.

In taking the action, Abdullah may have underestimated the reaction of Palestinians living in Jordan. Last Friday, some 3,000 Palestinians staged a sit-in to demonstrate their support for Hamas.

If such demonstrations continue, they could prove a crucial factor when Abdullah decides whether to press on with the crackdown on Hamas. □