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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

One killed in Israeli blast

At least one person was killed and nine injured when a van exploded in an apparent terrorist attack in northern Israel.

Thursday's explosion took place on a main highway that runs near the Arab city of Umm el-Fahm in the Lower Galilee.

Reports said the explosion occurred shortly after Israeli police, who have been on heightened security for possible attacks, stopped the van and began checking it.

Russian tycoon resigns from post

Vladimir Goussinsky resigned as president of the umbrella Russian Jewish Congress.

Goussinsky, currently under house arrest in Spain, said he resigned because of a "physical impossibility to fulfill his duties."

On Wednesday, the RJC elected Leonid Nezlin, the head of a leading Russian oil company, as acting president. Goussinsky has been the target of an ongoing Kremlin campaign on suspicion of fraud and embezzlement relating to his media empire.

Peres likely to get foreign post

Shimon Peres is likely to become Israel's next foreign minister.

The former prime minister was the only candidate to submit his name for the post in internal Labor Party elections that will be held Friday to determine who will serve as ministers in Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon's unity government.

A stiff race is on for the defense portfolio among Labor politicians Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, Matan Vilnai and Ephraim Sneh.

Shuls damaged in Seattle quake

Two Jewish institutions and the studio of a prominent Jewish artist were damaged in Wednesday's earthquake in Seattle.

Temple DeHirsch Sinai, a Reform congregation, and the Hebrew Academy, an Orthodox day school, closed their buildings today to assess damages, according to the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.

The studio of Akiva Segal, who is known for his Holocaust-themed pen and ink drawings, was reportedly destroyed, but neither Segal nor his artwork was hurt.

NEWS ANALYSIS

A decade after war, Saddam poses renewed threat to Israel

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A decade after he rained Scud missiles down on Tel Aviv during the Persian Gulf War, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein again poses a threat to Israel, analysts say.

A series of steps Hussein has taken in recent months, including moving army units in the direction of Israel while issuing threats, has heightened anxiety levels in Israel.

When Hussein blamed Israel for the bombing of Iraqi radar sites by American and British forces earlier this month, some Israelis again began to purchase gas masks.

Defeated by America and its allies during Operation Desert Storm in the winter of 1991, Hussein has hunkered down through a decade of sanctions and emerged with his leadership intact.

In recent years, he has quietly regained his standing among the Arab nations, who now flout U.N. sanctions on flights to and trade with Iraq.

Now, experts believe Hussein may try to increase his power in the Arab world by demonstrating his military strength.

Aiding the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel — especially with the fate of Jerusalem hanging in the balance for the world's 1 billion Muslims — may be the opportunity Hussein is looking for, several analysts said.

"The threat to Israel is that Saddam Hussein thinks his role in the Arab world will be advanced if he plays a role in the military aggression against Israel," said Patrick Clawson, research director for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

While several Arab countries joined the American coalition fighting Hussein in the Gulf War, the leaders' strategic choices never filtered down to the street.

There, Hussein's bombing of Israel and his decade-long defiance of America won him support.

"He gets in touch with the people on the street and represents the feelings of radicalization," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Report. "And the rest of the Arab leaders are left to pick up the pieces."

Hussein in recent years has been re-embraced by the Arab League, and has developed relationships with new Middle East leaders such as Syrian President Bashar Assad and Jordan's King Abdullah. Those alliances have led to the weakening of sanctions against Iraq.

Imposed at the end of the Gulf War, the U.N. sanctions rely on neighboring Arab states to block military components from reaching Iraq.

With Iraq's neighbors less willing to play along in recent years, Hussein has reportedly been able to partially rebuild his forces.

The federal German intelligence agency published a report in recent days stating the Iraqi armament capabilities have improved considerably in the past two years. According to the German agency, the Iraqis have greatly stepped up efforts to produce chemical weapons, and could have nuclear weapons within three years.

Now, experts say, Hussein may use his military strength to establish himself as the staunchest ally of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and insert himself into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"They need each other," Pipes said of Arafat and Hussein. "Arafat strengthens Hussein's case as a leader of the Arabic cause," while the Palestinians need the financial and military resources Iraq can provide.

If Hussein takes on Israel, it will be nearly impossible for his Arab neighbors to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Report: Population may tilt

Palestinians will outnumber Israelis in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip by the year 2050, according to a recent U.N. report. According to the report, there are currently more than 6 million Israelis and 3.2 million Palestinians living in these areas.

Because of an extraordinarily high birthrate, the Palestinian population is expected to number 11.8 million people by 2050, while the Israeli population is expected to be 10.1 million.

Israeli jailed for refusing to serve

An Israeli reservist was sentenced to 20 days in jail for refusing to report to duty in the Palestinian territories. According to an organization that monitors such developments, the Israeli is the eighth soldier to be given a jail sentence for refusing a call-up to the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Settler patrols may be legalized

The Israel Defense Force is looking into ways to legally arrange patrols being conducted by Jewish settlers since the outbreak of Palestinian violence.

Sources told the daily Ha'aretz it is preferable that the patrols be coordinated with the IDF, since the army lacks a practical way to prevent them.

Kibbutz volunteers suspected

Israel is expected to deport two kibbutz volunteers suspected of taking part in Palestinian riots against Israel. The two 23-year-olds are suspected of providing Palestinians with information and taking part in demonstrations in Palestinian-ruled areas.

Jail costumes a Purim favorite

Costumes of the jailed former leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party are the hot item among Israeli youths this Purim. Yediot Achronot reported that the outfit includes a mask of Aryeh Deri, a striped prisoner's costume and the sign "He's Innocent."



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support the United Nations' sanctions, Clawson said.

In such a situation, the United States may be forced to negotiate for lesser sanctions that can be enforced more easily, say analysts.

David Wurmser, director of Middle East studies at the American Enterprise Institute, said it is inevitable that Iraq will take action against Israel in the next year or two. Any American behavior could provoke this, Wurmser said — either a feeling that Iraq must retaliate for increased U.S. engagement in the region, or that a lack of U.S. engagement has created a vacuum Hussein can exploit.

"The current situation leaves the United States at a strategic watershed," Wurmser said.

With sanctions having failed, the Bush administration will have to choose whether to go into the region and attempt to oust Hussein — or leave the situation alone.

Either way, Wurmser said, Iraq is likely to attack Israel.

"Israel will not be able to resolve this without some sort of conflict," he said. "Hopefully, it will happen while Saddam is going down."

But other experts say this scenario is far too dire. While Hussein may want to attack Israel, he's rational enough to realize that the disadvantages for him far outweigh any advantages, according to Shibley Telhami, a professor at the University of Maryland.

Former President Bush was criticized for not removing Hussein during the Gulf War. Any attack against Israel would lead to U.S. intervention against Iraq and give President George W. Bush the excuse to overthrow Hussein, Telhami said.

Hussein is not suicidal enough to take the bait, Telhami predicted.

"If he were to take on any adversary at this time, it would be the perfect opportunity for the United States and others who want to finish the job," Telhami said.

Hussein would like to see the current Middle East violence persist because it helps create a linkage in Arab minds between the Israeli-Palestinian situation and the Iraqi one and builds sympathy for Iraq, Telhami said. The linkage has grown as many Arabs blame America for the failure of the peace process, and it has created a wave of anti-Americanism in the region, which Iraq exploits, Telhami said.

Wurmser believes the United States will step up its enforcement role in the region and pursue a more aggressive policy against Iraq. The mid-February attacks against Iraqi radar sites may be a sign that what is left of the Gulf War alliance is ready to enforce the sanctions.

"I think the bombing shows that we will not, in the process of looking at whether we should modify the sanctions regime, overlook his bad behavior, and we will use military force where we think it is necessary," U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said last Friday en route to the Middle East.

But Hussein may not allow the new White House the luxury of choosing its own timetable. Iraq's campaign for legitimacy has reached a plateau, and Hussein may be eager to press forward.

In the last decade, Hussein has won the public relations war in the Arab community, shifting the blame for the plight of the Iraqi people onto the United States.

With the Arab world behind him, Hussein once again may set his sights on confronting the United States.

"He would like to use a combination of his geographical place next to the largest oil reserve and his weapons of mass destruction," Pipes said.

"Global ambition tinged with a hardened bitter desire for revenge — not a pleasant combination."

But while Israelis are keeping a wary eye on Hussein and his return to the Arab fold, they do not fear an imminent attack.

Ron Ben-Yishai, military analyst for the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, said Israeli experts are most concerned by the possibility that Iraq will be able to manufacture chemical and biological weapons in the immediate future.

Israel shares Western intelligence services' analysis about Iraq's potential for weapons of mass destruction, but there is no immediate concern of Iraqi missile attacks like those in the Gulf War.

In fact, according to Ephraim Sneh, Israel's deputy minister of defense, the greater danger to Israel comes from Hussein's neighbor, Iran — which also is embarked on a project for weapons of mass destruction, without the inconveniences posed by U.N. sanctions. □

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Poll: British Jews less leery

Jews are less worried about harassment than other religious minorities in Britain, according to a new study released by the British government.

Fifty-nine percent of Jewish respondents believe verbal abuse is a problem for the community, as compared with 82 percent of Sikhs and 75 percent of Muslims. Slightly more than 50 percent of Jews reported being concerned about religious vandalism, as opposed to 81 percent of Sikhs and 72 percent of other Hindus.

Papon: Je ne regrette rien

A convicted French Nazi collaborator is dismissing calls to show remorse for his role in deporting Jews to concentration camps during World War II.

"How could I express sorrow and remorse for a crime I did not commit, and in which I played no part at all?" Maurice Papon wrote in a letter to a French newspaper. Papon is serving a 10-year sentence for crimes against humanity.

S. Africa mission to go to Israel

South Africa's Parliament voted to send a delegation to the Middle East to help Israel and the Palestinians end their current conflict. Several lawmakers warned that the delegation must be even-handed and unbiased.

Nazi to be tried in absentia

Adolf Eichmann's deputy is slated to be tried in absentia in a French court, beginning Friday, for deporting at least 250 Jews to Auschwitz in 1944.

If still alive — he would be 88 years old — Alois Brunner is believed to be hiding in Syria. Brunner is held responsible for deporting 140,000 Jews to concentration camps.

Siberian teens turn fascist

Fascism is gaining in popularity among Siberian teen-agers, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

The teens, who claim they do not believe in genocide or racial hatred, admit to being influenced by Hitler's writings. They reportedly believe they are defending Russia against takeover attempts by Jews and people from the Caucasus Mountains.

Steel City Jews boost aliyah

A group of single-parent families from Moldova helped by the Pittsburgh Jewish community arrived last week in Israel. Before immigrating to Israel, the 10 mothers and 13 children took a Jewish Agency for Israel preparation course in Kishinev, Moldova, sponsored by Pittsburgh-area Jews.

Lieberman can see Nation of Islam in faith-based program; ADL differs

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and the Anti-Defamation League once again find themselves at odds over the Nation of Islam.

A week after the ADL urged the Bush administration to blacklist the Nation of Islam from President Bush's new faith-based initiative program, Lieberman said the group should not be disqualified because of the offensive comments its leaders have made.

Speaking Thursday in Washington at the opening of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Lieberman told a questioner that the Nation of Islam would have to be considered for participation on its merits, just like other service providers.

"I wouldn't say no" just "because at some point some leader associated with that religious group said something that I found offensive and insulting, or that society generally would have found to be at least intolerant," he said.

Calling them a hate group, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman responded Thursday that Lieberman was "seriously mistaken" about the Nation of Islam.

"This organization has for years, and has continued, to promote hate and separatism," Foxman said. "It's unfortunately part of their being."

ADL leaders met with John DiIulio Jr., director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, about the issue last month.

They said DiIulio "showed great understanding and sensitivity" to the organization's concerns.

The Nation of Islam did not respond to requests for comment.

Bush sparked controversy last year when he said the Nation of Islam is based on universal principles, and therefore should be allowed to compete for government funding.

He later retracted his statement, saying he confused the Nation of Islam with the larger Muslim faith.

In a letter to the ADL a year ago, Bush explained his confusion and said he was familiar with the "history of hateful and anti-Semitic comments" by Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam's leader.

The ADL was one of a group of Jewish organizations that criticized Lieberman when, as the Democratic candidate for vice president last year, he planned to hold a meeting with Farrakhan.

The meeting never materialized.

The ADL also criticized Lieberman for referring frequently to God in his campaign speeches.

In his talk Thursday, Lieberman said he supports charitable choice but cautioned that Bush "has fallen short" on explaining the details of his plan and how it will avoid violating the constitutional separation of church and state.

"This is one case where the devil really is in the details," Lieberman said.

The junior Connecticut senator said several major questions remain about the faith-based program. He specifically pointed to the issue of whether charitable choice programs should receive the exemption from non-discrimination in hiring that religious programs enjoy, and whether safeguards will be implemented to keep federally-funded programs from proselytizing.

Lieberman also said Bush has not defined what constitutes a religious group, and asked whether Americans would be comfortable having federal dollars going to the Hare Krishnas or the Church of Scientology.

But he also asked what harm there is in social programs with religious overtones.

"Does society have more to fear from a rehabilitated drug addict who has broken his habit through a religion-based treatment program than the untreated drug addict?" Lieberman asked.

Lieberman said most Americans want religion to play a larger role in society, but do not think people should force their faith upon others.

"When we make our case to skeptics, our language must be precise and the laws and programs we develop to harness the best forces of faith must be tight," he said. "We are not calling for government endorsement of religion." □

At least one dead, nine hurt in bombing in northern Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's security situation deteriorated this week, as terror claimed more victims.

At least one person was killed and nine wounded in an explosion in a taxi van Thursday near the city of Umm el-Fahm in the Lower Galilee.

Police suspect the bomber, who was seriously wounded in the attack, was involved in the planting of a bomb in central Tel Aviv on Wednesday.

That bomb was discovered and exploded by police bomb experts, destroying a restaurant but injuring no one.

Later on Thursday, a driver tried to run over Israelis waiting at a hitch-hiking post near an army base, then fled the scene. No one was hurt in that attack.

A Palestinian killed eight Israelis in a similar hit-and-run attack last month.

Outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he is convinced the two bomb attacks were linked and were part of an effort by Palestinian terrorists to test Israel's endurance.

Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh expressed concern that terrorist activity, which has stepped up since the outbreak of Palestinian violence in October, was "creeping into the heart of Israel."

A previously unknown group, the "Battalions of the Seven," claimed responsibility for Thursday's bombing, according to Qatari television.

But Sneh blamed Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, charging that he allows terror groups to operate unimpeded in Palestinian territory.

Palestinian officials released dozens of terrorists shortly after the Palestinian uprising began last fall, and Arafat has refused to condemn the anti-Israel attacks of recent months to either Israeli or U.S. satisfaction.

The chief of staff of the Israeli army, Lt.-Gen. Shaul Mofaz, warned Wednesday that the Palestinian Authority was devolving into a "terror entity" on Israel's border, encouraging and even participating in attacks.

Also Wednesday, an Israeli security guard was wounded when shots were fired at workers building a highway just inside Israel's pre-1967 border. Israeli military officials said gunmen crossed into Israel from the adjacent Palestinian town of Kalkilya, fired and fled safely back to the Palestinian areas.

Israel sealed off Kalkilya in response.

Thursday's bomb explosion occurred on the Wadi Ara Road, one of the arteries linking central Israel with the north.

The road passes through the Arab population center in the Lower Galilee.

Umm el-Fahm, the largest Arab city along the road, in recent years has become the base of Israel's fundamentalist Islamic Movement.

Reports said police began chasing the taxi van from the Tel Aviv area after receiving information that a terrorist with a bomb might be heading north. At one point, a police car stopped traffic and began checking cars.

The explosion occurred when a police officer began checking the passengers in the van.

"The police officer had opened the door to the taxi and begun

checking the passengers when there was a huge explosion," said Daniel, a truck driver who was near the scene.

Police said the bomber apparently was sitting in the back of the van. The head of the police's northern district, Alik Ron, said it appeared the other travelers were innocent bystanders.

One woman was seriously injured. Some passengers were trapped inside the twisted remains of the vehicle, and helicopters were summoned to evacuate the wounded to hospitals.

Ron said police did not have further information on terrorist cells that might be working inside Israel.

Police said roadblocks set up in central Israel in the wake of Wednesday's failed attack were not necessarily linked to the hunt for the bomber in Thursday's attack. □

Elderly Jews in Moldova election help restore the Communist Party

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The mostly elderly Jewish community of Moldova joined much of the country in backing the Communist Party's stunning electoral victory this week.

The ongoing economic crisis in Europe's poorest country fueled the Communists' victory in Moldova, a former Soviet republic of approximately 4.5 million people that lies between Ukraine and Romania.

"I don't really believe the Communist comeback means any revolutionary change. It is all economically motivated. All people, including Jews, are sick and tired of the economic collapse, the poverty, the terrible unemployment," Nora Leoshkevitch, the editor of a Jewish newspaper in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, told JTA.

Jewish organizations in Chisinau, better known to Jews as Kishinev, said middle-aged and elderly Jews — the majority in the roughly 30,000-strong Jewish community — voted for the Communists on Sunday out of nostalgia and a desire for increased social services, while younger Jewish voters opted for pro-Western parties.

But younger Jews are becoming a rare species in Moldova. Most have already emigrated to Israel, the United States, Russia or Germany — or are preparing to do so.

The Jewish Agency for Israel reported 1,700 Jews immigrated to Israel from Moldova in 2000 — a 40 percent increase from 1999 — mostly because of economic duress.

Moldova suffers from a lack of basic supplies and undergoes routine power outages.

As a result of their first victory in Moldova since the country gained its independence in 1991, the Communists will hold 67 seats in the 101-seat Moldovan Parliament.

Observers note that the Communists could push for Moldova to move closer to Russia, including the possibility of Moldova joining Russia and Belarus in a Slavic alliance.

Vladimir Voronin, the head of the Communist Party, told Russian television on Monday that he discussed the possibility of such an alliance with Russian President Vladimir Putin in January and that he will call a referendum on the matter soon.

Voronin, who is ethnically Russian, says one of the new Parliament's first steps should be to make Russian an official language.

The majority of Moldovans speak Romanian.

But some Jewish activists in Moldova are concerned that this step could aggravate social tensions and encourage extremists. □