



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Suicide bomb strikes Netanya

A suicide bomber blew himself up in Netanya on Sunday, killing three Israelis and wounding at least 65. Following the bombing, bystanders attacked Arab workers in the area, injuring one seriously. [Page 4]

Arafat denies bomb responsibility

A spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat rejected Israel's accusations that the Palestinian Authority bears responsibility for Sunday's bombing in Netanya.

Israeli security officials say the Palestinian Authority is doing nothing to combat terrorism, while members of its security apparatus are taking part in anti-Israel attacks. Meanwhile, Hamas officials called the bombing an "act of self-defense" against Israeli aggression. [Page 4]

Sharon nears unity government

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon reportedly reached agreements with a far-right party to join his unity government.

Under the reported agreement, Avigdor Lieberman of the Israel, Our Home Party would become national infrastructure minister. Rehavam Ze'evi, who in the past has said Palestinians should be moved out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, would become tourism minister.

Sharon also reached agreement with the fervently Orthodox Shas Party to join his government.

Sharon could be ready to present his government for approval as early as Wednesday. [Page 4]

Israeli Druse to serve in Cabinet

Israel's Labor Party chose Druse Knesset member Saleh Tarif to become the first Arab Cabinet minister in Israeli history. Likud officials said Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon, who promised to appoint a non-Jewish minister, is pleased with the choice of Tarif, a captain in the army reserves.

UJC's finance chief resigns

The United Jewish Communities' chief financial officer resigned after 17 years in the federation system. Lee Twersky's resignation comes on the heels of the departure of the UJC's chief operating officer, Louise Stoll, but officials for the umbrella group of U.S. federations say the two moves are unrelated.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ariel Sharon's victory boosts Arabs' anti-Israel diplomatic efforts

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Reinvigorated by the election of Ariel Sharon in Israel, the Palestinians and their Arab allies are stepping up their diplomatic efforts to isolate Israel on the international stage.

Observers say the Palestinians' diplomatic attack is a corollary to their "Al-Aksa Intifada": a way to achieve at the United Nations, as on the street, what they have been unable to win at the negotiating table. But some now detect an even broader agenda.

"The onslaught of questioning of the Jewish historical narrative and the connection to the land of Israel and Jerusalem, the increase in Holocaust denial within the Arab world, are all part of a deliberate strategy to erode the legitimacy of Israel as a sovereign state," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

"Internationally, the basis of Israel's legitimacy is its historical and biblical links, and the Holocaust demonstrated the tragedy of a people without a sovereign state," Harris said. "If you begin to chip away at these notions, you can begin to chip away at Israel's legitimacy as a sovereign state."

Israeli diplomats and American Jews are working to ward off the diplomatic attack. They hope the Bush administration will join the fray, but the Arab world — with its allies in the developing world — enjoys a numerical advantage in international forums.

Several high-profile forums are planned in the coming months under the auspices of the United Nations, which historically has been anti-Israel, Jewish observers say.

At a minimum, activists are bracing for a barrage of anti-Israel condemnations.

Jewish observers say the Palestinians are renewing their push for an international peacekeeping force for the West Bank, ostensibly to protect the Palestinians from Israel.

"The Palestinian Authority instigated and sustained the violence, and now they're calling on the international community to protect them from the violence," said Harris Schoenberg, chairman of the U.N. caucus of Jewish nongovernmental organizations.

Calls to the Palestinian representative to the United Nations, Nasser al-Kidwa, were not returned. But a spokesman for the Organization of the Islamic Conference denied there is any campaign to isolate Israel.

Israel is guilty of causing the problems because it occupies Palestinian land, Yussef Kanaan, a spokesman for the OIC office in New York, told JTA.

"The minute there is complete recognition that there is occupation, this will be a basis for the peace process to really succeed," Kanaan said.

Israel advocates disagree.

The Palestinian leadership has always operated on "parallel tracks," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. The Palestinians seek Israeli concessions at the negotiating table while they and their allies seek to isolate Israel diplomatically, Hoenlein said.

The preferred venue is the United Nations, where Arab and Muslim states, together with Third World supporters, regularly close ranks to denounce Israel. After a thaw in Israel-U.N. relations last summer, the intifada unleashed a wave of anti-Israel animus.

Many Israel backers claim the Palestinians purposely send their children to the front lines of clashes with Israeli troops to win sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

The strategy appeared to work at first, as several anti-Israel resolutions were passed in the U.N. Security Council and General Assembly in New York and by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

The human rights commission declared Israel guilty of "war crimes" and "crimes

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian: We planned intifada

The Palestinian Authority communications minister said the current intifada did not begin spontaneously in September after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but was planned after the Camp David summit failed last July.

Palestinian officials criticized the remarks by Imad Falouji, but did not deny them.

Israeli envoy: I'll remain in post

David Ivry, Israeli ambassador to the United States, said he will stay in his post when Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon's unity government takes office. Ivry met with Sharon earlier this week and said the two have a good relationship, stemming from the time both served as generals in the Israel Defense Force.

Rights group warns Palestinians

The U.S.-based Human Rights Watch expressed concern to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat about the death of a man in security custody earlier this week.

The group said Salim al-Akra, the 23rd person to die under suspicious circumstances while in Palestinian custody since 1994, may have been tortured.

Israel credit rating remains high

Moody's Investors Service reaffirmed Israel's credit rating at A2, a rating that was upgraded in July.

The ratings agency cited the independence of Israel's export-oriented, high-tech economy from current political events in the region.

EJC: Stop Holocaust conference

The European Jewish Congress is calling on Lebanon to cancel a Holocaust-denial conference in Beirut late this month. "Just as Chile refused" to host a similar conference last year, "Beirut must not become a place for meetings between fanatical Islamists and Holocaust deniers," the EJC said in a statement.



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against humanity," even before sending a team to investigate.

World sympathy for the Palestinians seemed to decline slightly, however, as the media began reporting on gunmen among the Palestinian street demonstrators and as the Palestinians resumed a campaign of terror attacks against Israel.

The Arab world hopes last month's election of Ariel Sharon as Israeli prime minister will provide fresh fodder for its anti-Israel crusade, Jewish advocates say. Arab commentators denounce nearly every Israeli leader as a "war criminal," but they reserve special venom for Sharon, whom they call a "butcher."

Some Jewish observers say there may be calls to indict Sharon for war crimes in connection with the 1982 massacre of Palestinians by Israel's Lebanese Christian allies in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. An Israeli commission found Sharon, defense minister at the time, indirectly responsible because he failed to prevent the massacre.

Israel backers predict a series of provocations — like recent terrorist attacks in Israel or harassment by Hezbollah on the Lebanese border — that would trigger a harsh response from Sharon and garner international sympathy for the Arabs.

Up first on the diplomatic front is the Arab world's demand for a meeting on the Fourth Geneva Convention. Established in 1949, the treaty deals with "protection of civilian persons in time of war" and other issues related to occupied territories.

In the half-century since the treaty was signed, only one conference has been called to discuss violations: On July 15, 1999, at the behest of the Arab world, some 100 participants gathered in Geneva to discuss Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

The meeting, which was boycotted by Israel, the United States and Canada, lasted just 17 minutes. It was then adjourned indefinitely. In October, the 22-member Arab League implored the Swiss government to convene a second conference on Israel's alleged violations of the Geneva Convention. A Feb. 15 deadline to receive feedback from member-states — and gauge the level of interest — has been delayed.

The United States is strongly opposed to a second conference, but several European countries have indicated they will respond positively.

A meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights is set for March 19. Jewish activists like AJCommittee's Harris predict stinging criticism of Israel. Attention then will turn to the "World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" in early September in Durban, South Africa.

Jewish activists fought bitterly to have the issue of anti-Semitism included on the agenda, but they will have a bigger battle on their hands. At a preparatory meeting Feb. 19-21 in Tehran — from which Jewish groups were effectively banned — the Asian and Arab participants produced a document that alarmed Jewish activists.

The document decried Israeli treatment of the Palestinians as "a new kind of apartheid, a crime against humanity, a form of genocide and a serious threat to international peace and security." According to Schoenberg, who has been closely monitoring preparations for the Durban conference, if the Tehran resolution is accepted in Durban "it would be a reincarnation of the 'Zionism is Racism' libel," a U.N. resolution that was on the books from 1975 to 1991.

Jewish activists are redoubling their efforts to limit the damage to Israel's image, but they still are waiting impatiently for the leadership of the United States. The Bush administration has yet to formally appoint a new U.N. ambassador. Career diplomat John Negroponte is the leading candidate.

Meanwhile, Jewish activists were angered by the U.S. State Department's annual human rights report, released last week, which criticized Israel for allegedly using excessive force against Palestinian assailants. The report implies a moral equivalence between Palestinian violence and the Israeli response, Hoenlein said.

The report creates "the potential for mischief," Hoenlein said. "It can be used and distorted by Arab-American groups, or by members of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, to show that 'it's not only us; the U.S. also says Israel uses excessive force.'"

How aggressively the new Bush administration will defend Israel, diplomatically or militarily, remains to be seen, Harris said.

"Whether it's Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden or Yasser Arafat, a new administration is always going to be tested to see if it will come out strong and four-square for Israel or if there will be a gap or distance," he said. "We can work as energetically as possible to ensure there is never a gap," Harris said, "but until there is a moment of testing, we can never be sure what the response will be." □

JEWISH WORLD

Germans protest extremism

Thousands of Germans held protests against intolerance and extremism. Saturday's protests came after the government released statistics showing that far-right crime in Germany has reached the highest level since World War II.

The leader of Germany's Jewish community and Germany's interior minister said the numbers show that the threat of the far right in Germany is not exaggerated. According to the government, there were 15,951 far-right crimes in 2000, a 59 percent increase over the previous year.

Coalition to fight intermarriage

A coalition of 25 Jewish communal leaders, rabbis and Judaic scholars is vowing to work together to "restore the ideals of in-marriage" and "promote its importance to the future of the Jewish community."

The new group — which includes Orthodox, Conservative and Reform individuals and is under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee — says it is alarmed by recent research indicating a growing American Jewish acceptance of intermarriage.

Nazi sentenced in absentia

The highest-ranking Nazi believed to be still alive was sentenced in absentia to life in jail by a French court.

Last Friday's verdict against Alois Brunner was for deporting 345 Jews to Auschwitz. Believed to be living in Syria, Brunner was Adolf Eichmann's personal secretary during World War II.

Charitable group to be created

Several major Jewish philanthropists, including Michael Steinhardt and Edgar Bronfman, are meeting to create a privately funded organization aimed at enhancing Israel's image, according to the Jerusalem Post. Called "Emet," Hebrew for truth, the new group is being described as a think tank.

Reform rabbis meet in Russia

A delegation of U.S. Reform rabbis completed a three-day visit to Moscow. Over the weekend, the 24 rabbis met with leaders of the Russian Reform movement to assess the state of Reform Judaism in Russia.

They also met with Kremlin officials and Russian lawmakers.

Philanthropist dies at 95

Jacob Hiatt, one of the major supporters of Brandeis University, died Feb. 25 in Worcester, Mass., at 95. Hiatt immigrated to the United States from Lithuania in the 1930s and became a successful businessman. In addition to his support for Brandeis, he also supported projects in Israel.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Embattled head of Russian Jewry finally buckles to Kremlin pressure

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The resignation of the Russian Jewish Congress' president is seen by many observers here as a capitulation to the Kremlin.

Vladimir Goussinsky, a Jewish media tycoon subjected to a Kremlin-backed campaign on allegations of fraud and embezzlement, said he quit because his legal troubles are preventing him from fulfilling his duties as president of the umbrella Russian Jewish Congress.

RJC leaders say Goussinsky, who resigned last week, is sacrificing himself to help an organization that has been harmed by its association with the beleaguered tycoon.

"He did not think of himself, he wants to help the organization and the community," Alexander Osovtsov, RJC's vice president, told JTA.

Osovtsov added that Goussinsky made the decision without pressure from anybody in the RJC or the general Russian Jewish community.

Goussinsky, who runs NTV, an independent television channel, was outspoken in his opposition to Russia's war against Muslim separatists in Chechnya and supported a rival of Vladimir Putin in Russia's presidential elections last year. Some here speculate that Kremlin officials "suggested" to the RJC that Goussinsky be replaced.

Whether or not the speculation is accurate, President Putin's administration has long applied indirect pressure on Goussinsky and the RJC.

Goussinsky was first arrested last June and released after a few days. He later went abroad, amid reports that he had cut a deal with Putin.

Currently under house arrest in Spain, Goussinsky is fighting extradition to Russia.

Parallel to its legal case, the Kremlin has sought to undermine Goussinsky's influence in the Jewish community through a divide-and-conquer strategy.

Since Putin took power in 1999, he has made it clear that he favors the Lubavitch-dominated Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia over the RJC — most publicly by appearing at several high-profile federation events.

Goussinsky's resignation leaves the community without its strongest voice for an independent, home-grown Russian Jewish philanthropy. The RJC supports Jewish communal projects throughout the country with money raised in Russia.

Goussinsky's replacement, Leonid Nevzlin, 42, a top manager of the YUKOS oil company, appears to be suitable to all sides.

YUKOS is headed by a leading Jewish tycoon, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is friendly with Goussinsky but not controversial.

Nevzlin's appointment will ensure that the RJC corrects its previous mistake of being too involved in politics, said Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, a leader of the Reform movement in Russia and a member of the RJC executive committee.

Berel Lazar, who is affiliated with the Lubavitch-dominated federation and is one of Russia's two chief rabbis, also approved of the appointment, saying Nevzlin would help develop the RJC.

In what is seen as a conciliatory gesture, Rabbi Lazar participated in the March 1 meeting of the RJC presidium that approved Goussinsky's resignation, along with Adolph Shayeveich, Lazar's rival and Russia's other chief rabbi.

Earlier this week, however, Lev Levayev, an Israeli diamond tycoon with business interests in Russia who is the main sponsor of the federation, met with Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Swiss-born chief rabbi of Moscow and one of the leaders of the RJC.

According to sources at the Moscow Choral Synagogue, Levayev urged Goldschmidt to recognize Lazar as the only legitimate chief rabbi of Russia.

Levayev, a new Kremlin insider, told Goldschmidt he had resolved the problems surrounding the renewal of the visa that allows Goldschmidt to remain in Russia.

With Goussinsky's resignation, the RJC appears to have admitted that it is losing the battle for Russian Jewish supremacy to the federation.

This view is supported by financial figures. RJC officials say the organization's 2001 budget will be much lower than the estimated \$10 million it spent last year. At the same time, the federation's 2001 budget is estimated at \$70 million.

Next, observers say, Goussinsky will be forced to relinquish his media empire. □

Terror strikes in Netanya: Three Israelis dead, dozens hurt

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Increased vigilance by Israeli security forces is proving unable to stop a wave of terror that many Palestinian groups promised would greet Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon.

In the latest attack, a suicide bomber blew himself up in central Netanya on Sunday morning, killing three Israelis and wounding at least 65.

The bombing came days after a bomber killed one Israeli by blowing up a taxi van in the Galilee on March 1.

Another bomb that was discovered in time Feb. 28 caused only property damage in downtown Tel Aviv.

Sunday's attack in the seaside city came as security forces already were on heightened alert for possible attacks before the Purim holiday this week.

Sharon, who has been working to form a national unity government to confront the five-month long crisis with the Palestinians, said the latest bombing underscored the need for unity.

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, selected by the Labor Party last Friday to serve as defense minister in a unity government, said he and Sharon would collaborate on a plan to combat terrorism.

Ben-Eliezer said the plan would focus on reaching the perpetrators of terror attacks and those who control them, while trying to minimize collective punishment against the general Palestinian population.

Sunday's blast came as heads of Israel's security establishment were briefing the Cabinet at its weekly meeting — probably its last before the change of government — on the security situation.

Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter updated the ministers on last week's bombings.

The security heads also briefed the ministers on steps being taken to prevent further attacks.

As part of efforts to prevent terrorist infiltrations from Palestinian-ruled territories, police have stepped up patrols along border areas and beefed up the security presence in large cities and vulnerable areas.

Israeli officials increasingly accuse the Palestinian Authority of failing to do anything against terror — and even encouraging and participating in attacks.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, an aide to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, denied Israeli accusations that the Palestinian Authority was partly to blame for the Netanya attack, saying Israel's own policies are responsible.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Sunday's attack, although Hamas had threatened over the weekend that it has dozens of suicide bombers ready to act after Sharon takes over.

Hamas officials praised the Netanya bombing as an "act of bravery" and "self-defense."

The attack in Netanya occurred during Sunday morning rush hour, shortly before 9 a.m.

Police said the bomber apparently set off the explosive as he stood among a group of people at a crosswalk on the city's main street, Herzl.

Netanya has been the target of several previous attacks because of its relative proximity — about 10 miles — to the West Bank.

In January, dozens of people were wounded when a car bomb

exploded approximately 100 yards from the site of Sunday's incident.

An Israeli court issued a gag order on details of the investigation into Sunday's attack.

Earlier, however, Israel's police commissioner, Shlomo Aharonishky, told reporters that the bomb appeared to be relatively small, and injuries were further reduced by the fact that the explosion occurred in an open space.

Witnesses said the bomber had tried to board a bus, but the driver refused entry to the Arab man with a heavy backpack. He then detonated the bomb on the street.

"I saw him bang on the door of the bus, but the driver, maybe sensing something, kept on going," said Moshe Sitbon, who was in his store at the time of the attack.

Natanel Sasson, a volunteer for Magen David Adom, the Israeli Red Cross, who arrived at the site, said he was stunned to discover that his sister was injured in the attack.

"When I got to the site of the attack, I saw the wounded lying on the road and smelled the scorched smell I know from assisting in previous attacks," Sasson said. "Suddenly, I saw my sister sitting among the wounded."

Sasson helped his sister to an ambulance, which took her to the hospital. Her injuries were described as light.

Following the attack, several citizens attacked Arab workers in the area.

One of the workers was seriously hurt and required hospitalization.

In a possibly related incident, Israel Radio reported that a man entered a supermarket in central Jerusalem on Sunday afternoon and stabbed three Arab workers.

The attacker fled, and the motive for the assault was not immediately clear.

Sunday's bombing came days ahead of Purim, which in recent years has been a magnet for terrorist attacks.

Yisrael, a Netanya municipal worker who reached the scene of Sunday's suicide bombing shortly after the explosion, said he would not let his children take part in public festivities this year.

The attack prompted calls from Sharon's potential coalition partners to conclude negotiations and put a government in place.

On Friday, Sharon's negotiators reached agreements with the far-right Israel, Our Home Party.

On Sunday, a deal was struck with Shas, a large, fervently Orthodox party, removing the largest remaining obstacle to a government.

Sharon has said he wants to present his government on Wednesday.

"The immediate creation of the Sharon government is the order of the day, in order to enable us to truly deal with the war going on inside Israel," National Religious Party member Shaul Yahalom said, warning that Israel is in a "dangerous twilight" of governmental transition.

A letter Sharon provided the Israel, Our Home faction drew criticism from the Labor Party, which said it contradicted agreements between Labor and Likud.

The letter stated that the new government will not be obligated by proposals raised in the Barak administration's peace talks in Camp David, Washington and Taba, that it will honor ratified agreements only if they are upheld by both sides, that it will be committed to a whole and unified Jerusalem and that it will adhere to Israeli interpretations of disputed U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. □