



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 90

Monday, May 14, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Two killed in helicopter strike

Israeli helicopters rocketed a car carrying Palestinian militia members in the West Bank city of Jenin. The attack killed one of the passengers and a Palestinian police officer who was standing nearby, and wounded 17 other people.

The head of Palestinian intelligence in the West Bank denied Israeli allegations that the people in the car Saturday were members of a cell that planned to carry out mortar attacks on Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

UJC taps Tisch for top post

The United Jewish Communities offered its top volunteer position to the president of UJA-Federation of Greater New York, according to a member of the UJC nominating committee.

The source said James Tisch of New York was asked to replace fellow philanthropist Charles Bronfman as chairman of the board, but has not yet responded.

Other UJC officials declined to confirm the nomination, saying they have been "talking to a whole host of people to see who's interested." [Page 4]

Israel nixes panel call

Israel rejected a portion of a U.S.-led commission's report that called for the end of settlement construction.

Speaking last Friday after U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said he hoped the report could serve as the basis for an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire, Israeli Cabinet member Danny Naveh said ending construction meant to accommodate a settlement's natural growth was "impossible."

On Sunday, Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath said Sunday the Palestinians will not return to the negotiating table unless Israel halts all settlement construction.

In a separate development, Powell said he has not ruled out the idea of appointing someone to replace Dennis Ross, who served as President Clinton's special envoy to the Middle East.

But Powell said last Friday that given the current state of Israeli-Palestinian violence, he does not see a reason to have someone "shuttle back and forth on a constant basis" between Washington and the Middle East.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel develops a new export: security classes for professionals

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Poli, an attorney from Munich, Germany, decided to train as a security officer after his best friend was killed in a terrorist attack in an Egyptian coffee shop.

"I wanted some peace of mind, the knowledge that I could defend myself and my family, if the situation should arise," said the lanky corporate lawyer, who does much of his business in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and refused to give his last name.

Where did Poli decide to go to learn how to defend himself?

Israel. And he's not alone — hundreds of people come to the Jewish state every year to learn security tactics.

Poli is finishing up an intensive International Security Academy training course in Israel, where he spent four weeks learning the ropes from some of the best in the business — former Israeli commandos.

He's lost a few pounds and his chest is bruised from shoving and punching during training, but he says he learned how to deal with almost any potentially dangerous situation.

"This kind of training gives you self-confidence," Poli said. "I'm not as big as some of these guys, but I can outrun most of them."

The ISA was founded by David Mirza, a former high-ranking security officer who, like most of his 30 instructors, is still "active" in the Israeli security forces.

The robust, jovial Mirza usually stands on the sidelines, occasionally shouting words of encouragement as the trainees wrestle, tussle and knee one another to the ground.

As Poli takes on two of his fellow trainees, sticking his regulation rubber knife in one and kneeling the other in the groin, Mirza smiles and claps, calling out, "And he's a lawyer!"

Most of the present participants are professionals or would-be security personnel from countries including Russia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Greece.

But more than a few are simply ordinary people who paid from \$2,500 to \$8,800 to spend 17 hours a day, for a minimum of one to four weeks, to learn how to detect, deter, push, kick, shove and, if necessary, shoot an attacker.

Most of the training takes place on the rolling green lawns of Hotel Kibbutz Shefayim about eight miles north of Tel Aviv.

As the trainees go through their morning session of hand-to-hand combat and simulations of drive-by shootings, guests arriving at the kibbutz hotel do a double take.

It's a surreal scene, watching this group of men dressed in regulation black pants, royal blue ISA T-shirts and dark sunglasses as they throw one another to the ground with a good amount of grunting and grimacing.

Despite the palm tree surroundings, most of the participants are well aware of where they are and why they're being trained by Israelis.

"Everyone knows the Israelis are the best at this kind of training," said Rohit Handa, a wiry Scottish investment banker who wanted to toughen himself up for future business trips in Russia, India and the Middle East.

"These are guys who have faced these kinds of situations," Handa said. "The Mossad is the world's best security force."

About 60 percent of the ISA training is theory, with daily classes on becoming

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat frees Hamas official

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat released a prominent Hamas official from jail, according to Hamas.

Abdel Aziz Rantissi was arrested in April for violating an agreement that bans the use of weapons at Hamas rallies, Palestinian security officials said at the time.

Arafat deputy to visit D.C.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's second in command is expected to meet in Washington on Monday with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

Palestinian officials hope the meeting will lead to a White House invitation for Arafat, who has yet to meet with President Bush.

Militants vow more terror

Hamas and Islamic Jihad vowed to step up attacks against Israel as part of observations Tuesday of "Al Nakba" — Arabic for "the catastrophe," which is what Palestinians call the creation of the State of Israel.

Ahmed Jibril, the leader of a terrorist group who said he was behind a weapons shipment to the Gaza Strip intercepted by the Israeli navy last week, called on fellow Arabs to provide funds to purchase more weapons for the Palestinians.

Israel Festival wants Wagner out

Organizers of the Israel Festival decided to ask conductor Daniel Barenboim and tenor Placido Domingo to reconsider performing a work by Richard Wagner at the festival on July 7.

Organizers said they oppose artistic censorship, but felt obliged to respond to a growing public outcry in Israel against the inclusion in the program of Wagner, an anti-Semitic composer whose works were among Hitler's favorites.



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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aware of one's surroundings and avoiding potential confrontations. After the participants have learned surveillance and avoidance techniques, they move to hand-to-hand combat, learning the unique Israeli "unarmed protection" methods.

The trainees practice combat shooting every day at facilities in nearby Kfar Saba and Caesarea, but the instructors stress that a gun is always a last resort.

And when Israelis do pull out their guns, they handle them differently than their European and American counterparts.

They don't keep their guns loaded, because it's easier to point the gun without a heavy bullet in the chamber. Instead, Israeli security officers draw and aim their guns while loading the bullets.

"Israelis do a few things differently that are very natural, much simpler and more sensible," said Andrew, a Swiss security executive and ISA graduate who visits the program on a regular basis to scout out potential employees, and who also refused to give his last name.

"There's no kung fu here."

There's no question that this group of 20 is enjoying the running, kicking, grunting and sweating of the intensive training.

And it is mostly a male group, aside from two women — graduates of the program — who often serve as targets in various exercises.

One of them is Alexandra Kanakaris, a German nuclear physicist who now works as the ISA coordinator in Germany. Married to a Navy Seal from Greece, Kanakaris was looking for a career that would combine physical fitness, psychology and a certain amount of physics.

When she couldn't find the right kind of security training in Germany, she came to Israel for the practical experience ISA could offer.

"They're not used to terror attacks in Germany," she said.

"It's more realistic here because, unfortunately, Israelis have real attack experience."

As a training exercise, the group took a field trip to Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, where Yigal Amir assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995.

The group went over each step of Rabin's walk through the "stitching points," the open, vulnerable area he passed through between the building and his car.

Their conclusion?

Despite some inexplicable security lapses, Amir succeeded primarily because of his determination to kill the peace process.

"It's impossible to be 100 percent secure," Andrew admitted. "When suicide bombers want to get in, you can't keep them from doing it. But you have to make it more difficult for them."

The current security situation in Israel didn't deter any of the ISA participants. In fact, most of them view the crisis as additional proof of their instructors' real-life credentials.

The threat from ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence makes training in Israel more intense than elsewhere, several participants said, as Israelis' awareness of potential danger makes them pay close attention to their surroundings.

Most ISA trainees may not ever be in such a tense situation, but they say their experience in Israel at least makes them more aware of potential dangers.

"There's been more crime, more drugs in Germany ever since" the Berlin Wall "came down," Poli said. "Terrorism is on the rise and it makes you realize it can happen anywhere." □

Lithuania to honor Japanese diplomat

NEW YORK (JTA) — Hundreds of cherry trees from Japan will be planted in Lithuania's capital to honor a Japanese diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Nazis.

Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus initiated the project commemorating Chiune Sugihara after a visit last month to Japan, where local businessmen agreed to help finance the \$100,000 project.

As many as 40,000 people, including descendants of survivors, owe their lives to Sugihara, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. □

JEWISH WORLD

U.S. judge irks German officials

German government and business officials are dismayed by the conditions a U.S. judge set for dismissing a key lawsuit dealing with Nazi-era slave labor.

After Judge Shirley Wohl Kram dismissed class-action lawsuits that had been blocking payments from a \$5.2 billion slave-labor fund, she issued the condition last Friday that the German fund also cover claims against Austrian banks.

Shooter sentenced to death

A jury last Friday sentenced to death a Pittsburgh man guilty of murder and hate crimes.

In April 2000, Richard Scott Baumhammers shot his Jewish neighbor, two men from India, two Asian men and a black man as he was driving through the suburbs of Pittsburgh, stopping twice to vandalize synagogues.

An appeal is automatic in death penalty cases in Pennsylvania.

Dutch insurers help survivors

Three Dutch insurance companies gave \$4.2 million on May 10 to a nonprofit foundation helping impoverished Holocaust survivors in California.

The money from Aegon, Fortis and ING America will fund the California Humanitarian Foundation for Holocaust Survivors.

Texas gets new hate crime law

Texas Gov. Rick Perry signed into law last Friday a bill that strengthens penalties in hate crimes motivated by a victim's race, religion, color, sex, disability, sexual preference, age or national origin.

The James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act was named for a black man dragged to death by three whites in 1998.

Washington rabbi faces probe

Prosecutors are investigating the handling of a rabbi's discretionary fund at one of the Washington area's largest synagogues, according to The Washington Post.

Rabbi Jonathan Maltzman of Congregation Beth El in Bethesda, Md., is accused of using the congregant-financed charitable fund for personal expenses.

California Hillel house vandalized

The University of California at Davis Hillel house was vandalized May 9, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Vandals broke one of the windows and set fire to the house's Israeli flag, damaging the rest of the building.

Synagogues use rescued scrolls as legacy of lost Czech communities

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — During World War II, the Nazis destroyed Jewish communities across Czechoslovakia and brought Jewish objects to Prague for a planned "museum of an extinct race."

But as a recent conference in Chicago showed, some of these objects are being used for a Jewish people that is, indeed, alive and well.

The conference, which was attended by Jews from across the United States and Britain, focused on 1,564 Czech Torah scrolls that were rescued nearly 40 years ago from an abandoned synagogue in Prague.

Most of the scrolls, part of a massive collection of Jewish ceremonial objects accumulated in Prague under the Nazis, are on permanent loan to Jewish institutions and synagogues across the world courtesy of their rescuers, the London-based Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust at the Westminster Synagogue.

All but 100 or so of the 1,564 scrolls originally brought to Westminster have been distributed — as far afield as Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, Puerto Rico and South Africa.

More than 1,000 are held by synagogues and Jewish institutions in the United States.

The Chicago event was attended by 50 scroll-holding representatives under the auspices of the U.S.-based Czech Torah Network, a group dedicated to showing congregations how they can explore the legacy of their Czech Memorial Scroll.

The conference, sponsored by the Chicago-based congregation B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim, included a workshop on the scrolls conducted by Michael Heppner of London's Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue.

"It was very emotional," he said. "We have a Kolin scroll that is very important to us.

"When we received it 35 years ago, it was the last glowing ember of a 600-year-old congregation. We blew on it, and thank goodness it didn't go out."

Heppner, who chairs Northwood & Pinner Synagogue's "Czech Connection," which has built bonds with the town and its lost Kolin congregation, said the conference was particularly important because many holders of the scrolls may be unaware of the "deeply symbolic" link between them and the destroyed congregations.

Others were equally moved by the conference, which covered a range of issues, including how to trace the original scroll-holding communities and how to encourage congregations to get more involved and interested in their scrolls.

Larry Glickman, senior youth group adviser at B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim, called the conference "wildly successful."

"People got what they came for," he told JTA.

"They left our conference enthused and excited about connecting with their 'Torah town.' I think you are going to be hearing about a lot more people traveling to the Czech Republic to visit these Jewish communities which, until now, have been largely forgotten about and ignored."

Glickman, whose congregation also holds a Kolin scroll, believes the scrolls represent much more than just ceremonial objects.

"For our congregation, the Kolin Torah puts a human face on the Holocaust," he said. "We have 480 people, names and dates to connect with — not the unimaginable 6 million.

"The scrolls remind our congregation of the Jewish people of Kolin. The Jews of Kolin have no one to carry their memories, they have no one to say Kaddish for them. We see ourselves as the inheritors of their Jewish tradition.

"We say their names, we clean their graves, we pray in their synagogue. We remember."

The gathering was made possible by the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust, which not only rescued the scrolls from gradual decay in an abandoned synagogue but also restored as many of them as possible.

The Czech Torah Network plans to hold more workshops throughout the United States over the next few years. □

Source: James Tisch tapped for top national Jewish post

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The United Jewish Communities has offered its top volunteer position to the president of North America's largest Jewish federation.

According to a member of the UJC nominating committee, James Tisch of New York has been asked to replace Charles Bronfman as UJC chairman when Bronfman steps down in October.

Tisch, the president and CEO of Loews Corporation, apparently is looking into the matter and is expected to give an answer in the next two weeks.

Tisch declined to comment. UJC officials similarly declined to confirm the nomination, saying they had been "talking to a whole host of people to see who's interested."

Officials and several committee members say the process is supposed to be secret to avoid offending future candidates, who could learn that they were offered the position only after someone else declined.

In addition to Tisch's own involvement with UJA-Federation of Greater New York, his parents, brother and wife also are well known in the Jewish philanthropic world, where the Tisches are considered "mega-donors."

Tisch has a reputation for being a decisive person and a strong writer with little patience for process.

As president of the New York federation, Tisch has been outspoken in pressing the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella group that aims to coordinate Jewish activism on a range of social and political issues, to narrow its agenda and focus on issues of direct concern to the Jewish community.

His business ties have proven controversial however.

Loews owns the Lorillard tobacco company, and some board members of the New York federation objected when Tisch became president.

However, many Jewish leaders defended Tisch, saying that excluding leaders and donors because of their business interests would lead to a "slippery slope" whereby philanthropists could become mired in controversy over a wide range of businesses and practices.

Bronfman, the UJC's current chairman, is a former owner of Seagram, a liquor company that recently was sold to a French media company.

The issue of whether Tisch's tobacco interests might damage the UJC's image apparently was raised during discussions in the nominating committee, a member said.

In addition, some members were concerned over Tisch's lack of experience in UJC matters.

However, the committee decided that the positive qualities Tisch would bring to the job outweigh his negatives, according to the committee member.

The nominating committee also is seeking a replacement for its No. 2 lay position — chair of UJC's executive committee — to replace Joel Tauber, who also is stepping down in October.

Robert Goldberg of Cleveland — UJC's immediate past treasurer and the chair of its Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee — is the apparent favorite, according to several sources.

Goldberg, who is president of the Cleveland federation, said he had not been offered the position.

"If the community feels they want me I would do it," Goldberg said. "But if I don't get it my feelings won't be hurt." □

Holocaust denier is denied a chance to debate at Oxford

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — A student group at Oxford has canceled a debate on freedom of speech that was to feature Holocaust denier David Irving.

The Oxford Union, a debating society, decided to call off the event at the last minute after intense pressure from a range of groups, including the Union of Jewish Students, the Anti-Nazi League, the Association of University Teachers and Oxford's own Student Union.

The Anti-Nazi League, which had planned protests at the debate, originally scheduled for May 10, hailed the cancellation as "great news."

"It would have been horrendous for David Irving to get to speak in Britain," league spokeswoman Debbie Jack said.

The debate was to address the question of whether there should be restrictions on the freedom of speech of extremists.

Irving was scheduled to argue against restrictions, while Richard Rampton, one of the lawyers who successfully defended Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt from Irving's libel lawsuit last year, was to argue in favor.

David Mitchell, a Jewish student at Oxford, coordinated campus opposition to the event.

After distributing leaflets and pressuring other members of the panel to pull out of the debate, he put motions to the Oxford Union condemning the Irving invitation and demanding that it be canceled.

At a four-hour meeting on May 8, students voted 95 to 15 in favor canceling the debate, union spokesman Daniel Johnson said.

Under union rules, the votes were not binding on President Amy Harland.

She said she would announce her decision on the morning of May 9, the day before the event was to take place. At 1 p.m., a notice went up saying that the event had been canceled.

"To see it happen at the 11th hour was spectacular," Mitchell told JTA. "It's not easy to cancel something like this at the last minute," he added.

This is the third time in recent years that Oxford has canceled a planned Irving appearance. But Johnson said that having him participate in a free speech debate was different.

"He was not coming to discuss his beliefs, but to participate in a debate with vigorous opposition," he said.

The Board of Deputies, the umbrella organization that represents most British Jews, does not accept the distinction.

"By giving him a platform, whatever the topic, you are giving him a legitimacy that he did not have after the libel trial," a Board spokesman said.

In a highly publicized London case last year, Irving lost his lawsuit against Lipstadt for calling him a Holocaust denier.

In his ruling, the judge found that Irving "is a Holocaust denier, anti-Semitic and racist, and that he associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism." □