



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel slays radical group's leader

Thousands of Palestinians participated in protests Monday across the West Bank and Gaza Strip at the start of three days of mourning for the leader of a radical PLO faction killed by Israel.

Abu Ali Mustafa, leader of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who had been active in the Palestinian struggle against Israel for decades, was killed Monday when Israeli helicopters fired missiles at his office in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Mustafa was the most high-profile militant killed under Israel's policy of targeting people accused of planning attacks against Israelis.

Mustafa replaced George Habash last year as head of the PFLP, a group that opposes peacemaking with Israel.

Annan blasts Israeli action

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan accused Israel of stoking the Middle East crisis and called for international action before violence spread to neighboring countries.

"The Israelis have raised tensions in the region to levels we have not seen in many years," Annan said Monday during a visit to Austria.

He spoke after Israel assassinated the leader of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in a helicopter raid.

Patriots set up near Haifa

The Israel Defense Force set up a Patriot anti-missile installation Sunday night near Haifa.

According to an IDF spokesman, the installation, which is capable of intercepting incoming missiles, was set up as a military exercise.

But Israel Radio reported that local residents are concerned by reports that Hezbollah gunmen in Lebanon possess long-range missiles capable of reaching the Haifa region.

Chechen kidnapper sentenced

A Russian court sentenced a Chechen refugee to seven and a half years in prison for kidnapping an Israeli teen-ager who was held in Chechnya for five months before her release.

The court found Bulat Umalatov guilty of abducting Laura Lichtman in 1999.

Despite violence, Birthright hopes to send more young Jews to Israel

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Despite the drop in tourism to Israel after nearly a year of Israeli-Palestinian violence, one Israel experience program hopes to increase the number of young Jews it sends to Israel this winter.

Through aggressive marketing and an array of special-interest trips, Birthright Israel hopes to draw 10,000 young Jews this winter on its free trips to the Jewish state.

Whether that's a viable goal is up for debate, and even some Birthright alumni — who for the most part have given the program rave reviews — are skeptical that many people who have never been to Israel before will elect to go during a period of frequent terror attacks.

When Birthright Israel burst onto the scene two years ago, it had to turn away thousands of people vying for limited spots.

Even last fall, when registration began for that year's trips, it looked like Birthright would repeat its success.

The program, which aims to foster Jewish identity among uninvolved Jews aged 18-26, attracted 17,000 would-be travelers, but had room only for 10,000.

The outbreak of the Palestinian uprising last September, however, made many people skittish. Thousands of registrants canceled, and Birthright was able to send only 8,653 people — even after depleting its waiting list.

That was an increase from the 6,041 who went the previous winter, but lower than the target number. Another 5,700 young adults went in May and June of this year, down from the 7,562 initially planned.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, Birthright's executive vice president in North America, acknowledges that recruitment won't be easy this year.

"My kids are saying, 'Are you crazy going over there?'" Zimmerman said, referring to the concern that his own grown children express about security issues.

No one has been injured by terrorism or other violence while on a Birthright trip. Like last year, security measures this year will be intense: Birthright will review itineraries daily with the Israeli Ministry of Education and will work closely on security matters with the government and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Unstructured free time to explore and shop will be sharply curtailed, particularly in urban centers.

In addition, Birthright is creating a database of itineraries so parents can locate their child's bus at any moment.

Despite the added headaches of security and recruitment, there has been virtually no public discussion of cancelling or postponing Birthright trips until the situation calms down.

The question arose after the June 1 suicide bombing outside a Tel Aviv nightclub and again after the Aug. 9 suicide bombing at a Jerusalem pizzeria, but "the feeling was that now more than ever it's essential to be there and keep the trips going," Zimmerman said.

If "you lose the sophomore now or the junior now, you're not going to have them in another year," Zimmerman said. "Later they could be going to medical school or Cancun."

Canceling trips would have economic consequences for Israel, and often is perceived as a betrayal of the Jewish state.

When the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations canceled all youth trips to Israel this summer — and when the U.S. delegation to the Maccabiah

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel plans new retaliations

Israeli officials reportedly are planning to step up their response to Palestinian attacks by targeting manned Palestinian security positions.

Until now, Israeli military reprisals have been delayed, giving Palestinian officials an opportunity to evacuate potential targets.

Gilo again comes under fire

Palestinian gunmen fired shots at the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo on Monday, moderately wounding one resident.

After Palestinian gunmen fired shots at Gilo two weeks ago, Israeli tanks were poised to move into the neighboring Arab village of Beit Jalla, from where the fire originated.

Israel called off the incursion after Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat called upon the gunmen to stop shooting.

Palestinians: No cease-fire talks

Palestinian officials squelched reports that Foreign Minister Shimon Peres would meet soon with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to discuss a cease-fire.

"Can anybody think of negotiations now with these assassins and killers in the Israeli government?" Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said Monday.

Probe backs soldiers in Gaza raid

Three Israeli soldiers killed when Palestinian militants infiltrated an Israeli base in the Gaza Strip over the weekend were not killed by friendly fire, according to the initial findings of an army inquiry into the incident.

The inquiry also found that the guards on duty responded properly when they sighted the Palestinian infiltrators.

games almost canceled — they drew sharp criticism from Israelis and other Jewish groups.

Giving up Birthright trips would "hand Arafat the victory he needs," Zimmerman said.

"It would be the final nail in the tourism coffin."

Canceling also could stymie Birthright's future.

Birthright needs to maintain its momentum if it is to survive over the long haul, Zimmerman said.

Putting the trips on hold or reducing their size could jeopardize the financial support Israel gives to Birthright, and could push the program off North American Jewry's radar screen, Zimmerman said.

"It's the hardest thing in the world to energize the North American Jewish community," he said.

"You drop this, how do you get it moving again?"

So how to attract 10,000 young Jews at a time when many consider Israel a war zone?

Birthright hopes that aggressive marketing, word of mouth and several special-interest trips will help.

Among the new offerings is a cycling trip, one for deaf Jews, a sports trip and one in which participants learn Israel's history firsthand by traveling with veterans of Israel's wars.

Leonard Saxe, director of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Jewish Studies — which has been researching the impact of the Birthright experience — said that Birthright attracted slightly older participants last year compared to its first year, and that trend is expected to continue.

Upperclassmen and college graduates don't rely as much on their parents' approval and may see visiting Israel now as an adventure, Saxe said.

Birthright's recruitment also may benefit from the recommendations of alumni, Saxe said.

"The more people who go on Birthright programs, the more people who talk about how safe it is, then recruiting gets easier over time," he said.

"I don't think the question will be can they get people to register or apply, but depending on what's happening a few months from now, will they show up at the airport?"

Some people who have registered for this winter's trip, like 26-year-old Brian Schultz of Seattle, have warned that they may pull out later.

"I'm definitely apprehensive," Schultz said.

While he is "committed to going unless something causes me not to," Schultz said, he is watching the situation closely and will consult with Israeli friends as the trip draws closer.

Birthright alumni offered mixed views about the program's recruitment prospects this year.

Robyn Weisman, a sophomore at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., said Birthright will have "a big challenge just getting past what's in the papers."

Weisman, who went on a Birthright trip last winter and loved it, said she plans to help recruit on her campus this year and noted that the program needs "to get more students out there, assuring people."

Even if Birthright assures them that Israel will be safe, some prospective participants may be put off by the strict security measures and limited itineraries.

Saul Daiell, a Binghamton University junior who went on a Birthright trip this summer shortly after the Tel Aviv bombing, said he enjoyed the trip, felt safe and would recommend it to others.

But, he noted, "I felt I didn't really get to see Israel in terms of the full scope."

Instead of spending a lot of time in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, his group substituted activities like canoeing on the Jordan River and taking part in archaeological digs.

"They didn't let us out at night, and we weren't able to get to other parts of Jerusalem or urban areas," Daiell said.

Asked what Birthright could do to recruit people this winter, Daiell said "it basically all depends on the situation in Israel, because that's what people hear about in the news, and parents are keeping a close eye on that." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Wallenberg memorial defaced

A monument to Raoul Wallenberg in Stockholm was defaced by spray paint Saturday morning.

The incident took place less than 24 hours after the memorial was inaugurated by Sweden's king and foreign dignitaries.

A Swedish diplomat during World War II, Wallenberg helped save tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis.

Controversial Belgian law backed

Belgium's prime minister said he is skeptical about changing a Belgian law allowing its courts to prosecute foreign officials for human rights abuses committed outside Belgium.

Instead, Guy Verhofstadt suggested that the law be extended to the entire 15-nation European Union. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been sued under the 1993 law in connection with his role in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon.

Mideast link in Turkey slaying?

Turkish police believe the weekend murder of a leading Jewish businessman may have been linked to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Police reached the conclusion after no evidence was found to confirm initial suspicions that Uzeyir Garih was killed by a mentally disturbed, teen-age drug addict. Garih, 72, a prominent member of Turkey's Jewish community, was found dead in an Istanbul cemetery Saturday.

An examination of Garih's wounds led police to suspect that three people may have been involved in the stabbing, a local newspaper reported Monday.

German officials slam P.A. texts

The leader of Germany's Jewish community joined German representatives to the E.U. Parliament in calling for a halt to E.U. funding for Palestinian education projects because some of the money has been used to publish anti-Semitic textbooks.

Some of the \$20 million in E.U. funding flows into books that "sow the seeds for suicide bomb attacks," said Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

Texas Jews help Christian school

Using almost \$3 million in donations from the local Jewish community, Texas Christian University in Fort Worth has introduced a substantial Jewish studies program, according to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

"If you know about early Judaism, you have more tools to interpret the New Testament," one student at the Disciples of Christ-affiliated school told the newspaper. "This is very important because Jesus was a Jew."

ARTS & CULTURE

Addition of Jewish jock forces religious issues on comic coach

By Daniel Fleishman

NEW YORK (JTA) — The funny pages are getting a little Yiddishkeit.

Syndicated comic strip "Gil Thorp" now features a storyline about star athlete David Green, an Orthodox Jew who joins his high school football team.

The strip, which has been published since 1959 and runs daily in more than 65 newspapers, focuses on the challenges of a high school sports coach. And life is about to get a bit more difficult for Thorp, who coaches football, basketball and baseball at imaginary Milford High School.

Adding the kipah-clad Green to the team forces Thorp to confront new issues, according to Gil Fried, a sport management professor at the University of New Haven in Connecticut.

Problems arise because the school's weekly games take place on Friday afternoon or evening and conflict with Shabbat. Green, an outstanding running back and defensive back, must leave the games early.

The strip also will tackle other religious issues, including being Jewish in a predominantly Christian community, Fried said.

The strip's new storyline will look at the issues from the perspectives of both the coach and the player, and will touch on Sabbath laws, anti-Semitism and religious tolerance.

The idea for the story came from Fried, an observant Jew who is a longtime fan of the strip.

Fried became friends with strip writer Jerry Jenkins four years ago when he pitched a story idea to Jenkins about risk management. Since then, Jenkins has taken a number of Fried's plot lines.

"I thought it would be a nice thing to show Jews in a positive light," Fried told JTA. "A lot of people think Jews can't be athletes. Here's a person dealing with this battle."

Fried originally named the character Arie, but the strip's syndicator changed it to David Green, thinking it would find a wider audience among both Jews and non-Jews.

"I knew they had to reach out to a larger audience," Fried said. "I understand that it's a secular press, not a Jewish press."

Jenkins, a best-selling author of sports biographies, including books on Nolan Ryan and Hank Aaron, also has written a biography of Christian evangelist Billy Graham.

Writing Green into his script was an extension of his own faith, Jenkins said.

"As a man of faith myself, an evangelical Christian, I share God's love of His chosen people," Jenkins told JTA.

"I was happy to be able to portray a person of faith in a positive light, standing true to his beliefs."

Green's behavior in the strip may remind some readers of Hall of Fame baseball player Sandy Koufax, who chose not to play in World Series games that fell on Yom Kippur, and current college basketball player Tamir Goodman, who skipped a game and a half of a conference tournament last year in order to observe Shabbat.

Fried said his primary goal is education.

"I'm hoping that it educates people who think" Jews "can't participate in sports," Fried said.

"They can take it to heart that a well-known Christian writer" is addressing the issue. □

Israel threatens to boycott Durban conference

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel said it would not send a delegation to a U.N. conference on racism slated to start later this week in South Africa unless anti-Israel language is removed from its resolutions.

The United States has backed Israel in demanding that the language be eliminated, threatening to boycott the conference if Israel is singled out for criticism. □

Israeli delegation heads to D.C. for talks on strategic relationship

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In what is being viewed as a symbol of American support for Israel, an Israeli delegation will arrive in Washington this week to continue a dialogue on the strategic relationship between the two close allies.

The meetings, a resumption of talks that flourished during the Clinton administration, are aimed at sending a signal that while the United States occasionally may criticize Israel's tactics in its conflict with the Palestinians, the two countries are still strongly aligned.

"The U.S. knows that Israel knows that the State Department has to say certain things in public," one military analyst said, citing recent condemnations of Israeli incursions into the West Bank and the seizure of Palestinian office buildings. "But in a private, face-to-face dialogue, there is a recognition of whose side the U.S. is really on."

Monday's talks were expected to broach a broad range of strategic issues, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, the emerging strategic relationship between Russia and the United States and the situation in Iraq.

Although it may not be on the agenda, the conversation likely will include the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence. The United States has been particularly critical of Israel's use of F-16 airplanes, and has pushed Israel to abandon its policy of targeted killings of Palestinian terrorists and militants.

The meeting is the first since the inaugurations this winter of President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon requested the talks during his first visit to the White House in March.

The dialogue will mirror the Strategic Policy Planning Group established by President Clinton and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 1999, which met every four months to bolster Israel's defense and deterrence capabilities.

Because many of the players have changed since those talks concluded at the end of the Clinton administration, this week's meetings may be a "getting to know you" session.

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage will receive the Israeli delegation, which will include Foreign Ministry Director-General Avi Gil, Sharon's foreign policy adviser Danny Ayalon, Defense Ministry Director-General Amos Yaron and National Security Council head Uzi Dayan, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Israel's ambassador to the United States, David Ivry, who formerly served as national security adviser, helped arrange the talks. The group also was expected to meet with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, the Post reported. □

Jews, officials differ on relations as burned synagogue is restored

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Local officials and Jewish leaders in the Russian city of Ryazan appear to agree that the fire that damaged the city's only synagogue earlier this month was arson, but not an outburst of anti-Semitism.

But they disagree about the state of ethnic tension in Ryazan,

located south of Moscow. "There is no interethnic tension in our city," said Nikolai Solovyov, Ryazan's deputy governor for security issues, adding that he believed the fire was set by vagrants who had slept in the empty synagogue while it was being repaired.

But according to Jewish activist Leonid Reznikov, the local government — while friendly toward the city's nearly 2,000 Jews — is trying to play down ethnic tensions, especially those fostered by Ryazan's former mayor, Valery Ryumin.

The fire was one of an increasing number of arson attacks against synagogues and Jewish schools — nine, according to Alexander Axelrod of the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League. There also have been a dozen desecrations of Jewish cemeteries, Axelrod says.

In what seems to be a typical situation in provincial Russian capitals, Ryumin, who remains an active political figure, is using nationalist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments to boost his popularity.

Some of the local media supported by Ryumin's grouping are using every opportunity to "raise the Jewish question."

Last week, a local businessman with Jewish roots was seen naked on the beach by a group of Russian Orthodox teachers and students, leading to an anti-Semitic campaign in the local media.

In a series of articles in a popular local newspaper, the businessman's Jewish roots were stressed. The man was accused of hating the Russian people, Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian soil.

Several days before the synagogue fire, the newspaper published a letter from a reader calling on ethnic Russians to "stop tolerating spits in the face with a slavish submissiveness."

Nearly a year ago, members of a neo-Nazi group known as Russian National Unity attacked the Ryazan Jewish Sunday school, breaking windows and threatening teachers and pupils.

Local official Solovyov says no one knows RNU's whereabouts, but they can be seen on Saturdays on the streets of Ryazan, wearing black uniforms adorned with swastikas and distributing newspapers that blame Jews for the misfortunes of the Russian people.

Despite this, not all is doom and gloom for local Jews.

The regional government is on friendly terms with the Jewish community, Reznikov says. Last week, Reznikov joined nine Russian officials and 17 police officers who flew to San Francisco for a seminar on combating hate crimes.

The weeklong seminar is sponsored by the U.S. State Department, the Anti-Defamation League and the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal as part of the Climate of Trust police training program.

The restored synagogue building, which dates from 1903, was returned to Ryazan's Jewish community last year. It had been slated to open its doors this fall to serve as a Jewish community center.

The Federation of Jewish Communities, which plans to send a rabbi to Ryazan to lead High Holiday services, said it has allocated \$25,000 to speed up the damaged building's repair.

"We will not give in to anti-Semitic pressure," said Avrohom Berkowitz, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

Meanwhile, the Russian Jewish Congress is working on the political front.

The RJC has issued a statement urging Russian authorities to take stronger action against the increasing number of anti-Jewish arson attempts. □