



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 162

Thursday, August 30, 2001

84th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli killed in West Bank attack

An Israeli truck driver was shot and killed at close range in a terrorist attack near the West Bank city of Nablus.

Oleg Sotnikov, 35, of Ashdod, was driving a fuel truck unescorted Wednesday on an isolated road where Palestinian gunmen had previously threatened to attack Israeli drivers.

### Shaky cease-fire in Beit Jalla

Israel and the Palestinian Authority reached a cease-fire agreement covering the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo and the nearby Palestinian town of Beit Jalla, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Wednesday after speaking by phone with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Israeli officials have offered to withdraw its forces from Beit Jalla once Palestinian gunmen stop firing on Gilo.

In the first hours after Peres' announcement, however, Palestinian gunmen and security forces directed fire at Gilo and at Israeli positions in Beit Jalla.

Earlier Wednesday, Palestinians fired at least two mortar bombs at Gilo.

Israeli police said one of the mortars slammed into a roof of an apartment building, wrecking solar water heaters but causing no injuries. The other exploded in an empty field.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell assured Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during a phone call Wednesday that the United States is pressing Israel to withdraw from Beit Jalla.

Powell also asked Arafat to help restore calm to the region.

### U.S. delegation heads to Durban

The U.S. State Department is sending a delegation to a U.N. conference on racism slated to start Friday in South Africa.

The delegation is led by Michael Southwick, a deputy assistant secretary for global issues in the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs.

The Bush administration announced Monday that Secretary of State Colin Powell would not attend the conference because of anti-Israel resolutions that will be taken up at the conference.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Bush's statements on Middle East leave Arabs claiming pro-Israel bias

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush may have walked into the White House proclaiming the United States an “honest broker” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but Arab officials warn that with each comment blaming Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat for Mideast violence, the United States is undermining its effectiveness as a mediator.

Recent comments by Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney have placed the bulk of responsibility for ending the 11-month-old violence on the shoulders of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, while showing more empathy for Israel's situation.

With each statement, Palestinian and other Arabs warn, the United States is losing its stature as a neutral mediator of the Middle East peace process.

Last Friday, in his most expansive comments to date, Bush spoke little about Israel's responsibilities, instead focusing on what Arafat needs to do.

“The Israelis have made it very clear that they will not negotiate under terrorist threat,” Bush told reporters last Friday.

“And if Mr. Arafat is interested in having a dialogue that could conceivably lead to the Mitchell process” — a series of diplomatic steps outlined by an international commission under former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell — “then I strongly urge him to urge the terrorists, the Palestinian terrorists, to stop the suicide bombings, to stop the incursions, to stop the threats.”

Bush also called for restraint from Israel, but many dismissed the statement as pro forma.

The generally pro-Israel rhetoric comes shortly after Cheney expressed some understanding for Israel's policy of targeting leading Palestinian militants and terror masterminds for death.

Bush also used a speech on missile defense last week to stress his ties to Israel, proclaiming, “Let's protect Israel and our allies and America.”

The White House has also gone beyond rhetoric. The announcement Monday that Secretary of State Colin Powell would not attend the upcoming U.N. World Conference Against Racism boosted Israeli efforts to delegitimize the conference's anti-Israel and anti-Semitic attacks.

Last week, the United States used its influence to discourage a Palestinian bid to bring U.N. peacekeepers to the Middle East.

The administration's stance has been condemned by Arab leaders, who say the United States is acting on behalf of Israel.

“We have now a full and absolute American bias,” Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi said.

“An American president is parroting the Israeli point of view.”

The official Web site of the Palestinian news agency quoted Arafat as calling Bush's recent comments “very ugly and pathetic.”

These statements are a far cry from the high hopes that the Arab world once held for the Bush administration, given what it saw as the more even-handed Mideast policy of Bush's father during his term as president — and the close ties between members of the present Bush administration and oil interests in the Arab world.

Indeed, most Arab Americans gave Bush their support in the 2000 election.

The White House bent seems to contradict the tone of the Bush administration's first few months. Concerned about avoiding the path of President Clinton, who brought

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israeli forces move into Rafah

Israeli tanks and bulldozers seized a main road to seal off Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

During Wednesday's operation, Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian policeman who was believed to work also for a militant group. Israel seized the area after Palestinian gunmen repeatedly fired on nearby army positions.

### Palestinians poisoning streams?

Palestinians are purposely dumping untreated poisonous sewage into streams flowing into Israel, according to Israel's environment minister.

Tzachi Hanegbi claimed Wednesday that residents of the West Bank cities of Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus are pouring raw sewage into streams that flow westward into Israel, the Jerusalem Post reported.

### Belgium has peace initiative

Belgium contacted officials in the United States and Russia to discuss a joint initiative aimed at ending more than 11 months of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Belgium holds the rotating presidency of the European Union until the end of the year.

### Extremists may have killed Arab

Right-wing Jewish extremists may have been behind the killing of a 25-year-old Palestinian in a shooting attack on a road east of Jerusalem on Tuesday night.

Israel Radio and Army Radio both received anonymous messages that the slaying was a revenge attack.

In another development, Palestinian officials said Israeli forces killed a Palestinian farmer Wednesday. The incident allegedly took place near the West Bank town of Tulkarm.

The army said it had exchanged fire with Palestinian gunmen in the area.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders together but failed to negotiate a peace deal, Bush tried to steer clear of the Mideast conflict.

He frequently commented that the parties would have to make the main effort to end violence, with the United States acting solely as a facilitator.

But six months of that approach did little to improve the situation in the region; in fact, the violence has gotten worse.

"When you are not in office, the entire Middle East looks very abstract," said David Makovsky, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"After trying to be nonjudgmental for months, you realize the situation is crying out for judgement."

What is unclear, however, is what is driving the White House's recent determinations.

While the Clinton administration was full of high-ranking officials with strong feelings on the Middle East, such officials are harder to find in the new regime.

Because many of Bush's and Cheney's comments seem unrehearsed rather than vetted, there is growing speculation that Bush's renewed embrace of Israel is driven not by what is best for the region but by domestic political goals — specifically, courting the American Jewish community and other groups that support Israel.

But some Israeli advocates say Bush simply is doing what he said he would — assessing the situation in the Middle East independently.

"The job of an honest broker is not to always be in the middle, but to make an honest call," said Israeli Embassy spokesman Mark Regev. "It's clear that the Palestinians are initiating violence and terror and that Israel is only responding, and it's clear that Israel has acted with restraint."

Jewish and Arab leaders in America do not believe the administration's comments will reduce U.S. legitimacy in the region or harm its role as the preeminent peace mediator.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he believes other Middle Eastern countries gauge the American interest in the region by how closely the administration aligns itself with Israel.

Any time Arab states see a gap between U.S. and Israeli positions, "they drive a Mack truck through it," Hoenlein said.

"I can't believe there is anyone who isn't impressed with what the president said and his sincerity," Hoenlein said.

"The pro-Israel position hasn't diminished the pressure for U.S. influence, it has increased it."

Despite its anger over Bush's comments, the Palestinian Authority continues to call for increased U.S. involvement in the peace process. Arab American leaders note the inconsistency, but see no other choice.

"It is a problem to say that we think their policy is misguided, but we want a stronger role," said Hussein Ibish, communications director for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. "The question is, What's the alternative?"

Despite threats from the Palestinian leadership, Ibish said it is unrealistic to believe that Arab countries will turn their backs on the United States, given the funds and influence it provides in the region.

"We have accepted the hegemonic role of the United States in the region," Ibish said. "But it is necessary to get the United States to play the role in a way that is constructive."

While Bush's comments have won praise from Israel, State Department statements continue to seek a middle ground. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher this week repeatedly chastised Israel's military retaliation to Palestinian attacks, calling on both sides not to exacerbate the situation.

After Israeli troops entered Beit Jalla in response to Palestinian gunfire on Monday, Boucher said, "The Israelis need to understand that incursions like this will not solve the security problems, they only make matters worse. As a consequence, we believe the Israelis should withdraw their forces from this area."

Many believe that the State Department's comments are intended to balance Bush's, restoring U.S. legitimacy as a mediator.

But as one Israeli official noted, when push comes to shove, "the president speaks for the United States." □



## 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](http://www.jta.org).

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Czech properties may be returned

Jewish communities in the Czech Republic could soon see the return of up to 100 pieces of real estate stolen from them by the Nazis or confiscated by the former Communist regime.

On Wednesday, the Czech government started to discuss the transfer of the first pieces of state-owned property to the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities. The list of properties under consideration includes cemeteries, buildings and vacant land.

### Carlos the Jackal backs revenge

An aging terrorist issued a call from his jail cell in France for attacks on Israel and the United States in support of the Palestinians.

Illich Ramirez Sanchez, known as Carlos the Jackal, made the appeal Wednesday after Israel killed the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine earlier this week.

"The killers of Abu Ali Mustafa came from Tel Aviv. The orders came from Washington," Carlos wrote. "The Yankee should beware."

### S.F. day school offers free tuition

A new Jewish day high school in San Francisco is offering two years of free tuition to its first three entering classes, according to the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California.

The tuition offer made by the Jewish Community High School of the Bay is funded through a challenge grant from Keren Keshet, a New York foundation that says it will offer similar gifts to other new Jewish schools if the California school meets certain enrollment and fund-raising goals.

One other new Jewish high school, the American Hebrew Academy boarding school in Greensboro, N.C., also offers free tuition, funded through the anonymous donor who has paid most of that school's costs.

### German court called too lenient

Czech Jewish leaders are criticizing a German court for being too lenient toward two Czech men who were convicted of shouting Nazi slogans in the former concentration camp of Buchenwald.

One was sentenced to two weeks in prison; the other was fined \$600.

### Hungary hosts Jewish fest

A weeklong Hungarian Jewish festival is taking place in Budapest and eight Hungarian towns. Now in its fourth year, the festival features concerts, ballet, movies and exhibits.

"The aim of the Jewish festival is to provide an opportunity when the word 'Jew' can be mentioned proudly," said Gustav Zoltai, director of the Hungarian Federation of Jewish Communities.

## Seeking to boost enrollment, Birthright turns to specialty trips

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Steve Rubin has packed a lot of adventures into his 22 years.

He has hiked Latin American volcanoes and scaled Italy's Mount Etna, the tallest volcano in Europe.

He has trekked through the Sahara Desert, gone hang gliding over the Swiss Alps and journeyed through Egypt with a friend.

So when he learned of the opportunity to go biking in Israel — for free — under the auspices of the Birthright Israel program, he was eager to sign up.

"The idea of it not just being some bus tour totally made it intriguing," said Rubin, who works as a digital strategy consultant in Chicago.

Birthright Israel has set itself an ambitious goal of recruiting 10,000 young Jews to go to Israel this winter — at a time when many people regard the Jewish state as a war zone.

The group always works with a variety of organizations that coordinate the actual trips, including Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the religious movements and the Jewish community center movement, among others.

But this year, in an effort to appeal to a wider audience and engage Jews who might not otherwise consider going to Israel, Birthright also sought groups offering special-interest trips, such as the cycling one.

"We're trying to appeal to more active, outdoor-oriented Jewish youth — that's a full market not being tapped, yet there are tons of Jews going on cycling and outdoor touring trips" elsewhere, said Avi Green, who is coordinating the bike trip. "It's a traditional Israel experience, going to all the sites you'd expect, but moving around the country by bike."

The trip will include cycling along the Burma Road — which served as an alternate route to Jerusalem during the 1948 War of Independence — biking alongside the Dead Sea, in the Galilee, Golan Heights and the Negev, and standard sightseeing in Jerusalem.

Brian Schultz, 26, of Seattle, signed up because he is "a big fan of activities outdoors" and "thought this would be a pretty cool way to see Israel."

It is not clear how much follow-up the cycling program will offer after the trip, however.

While the 10-day trips get rave reviews from participants and appear to strengthen young people's connections to Judaism and the Jewish state, critics frequently note that Birthright has done little to help alumni stay involved in Jewish life once they return home.

Campus-based trips under Birthright's auspices, in which students travel with their classmates — such as those run by Hillel and those under the auspices of university Chabad houses — generally have been credited with better follow-up than trips run by national organizers like the Chicago-based Israel By Bike, which is coordinating the cycling trip.

Asked about follow-up, Green said he would run an Internet discussion group so participants could stay in contact after the trip.

In addition to the cycling trip, other new Birthright programs include one for deaf Jews, a sports trip run by the Jewish community center movement, and Machal, a trip in which participants will learn about Israel's history by traveling with Canadian veterans of Israel's wars. □

## Russian Jews blast controversial film

MOSCOW (JTA) — A controversial American movie about a man who is both a Jew and a violent neo-Nazi recently opened in Moscow movie theaters.

"The Believer," which earned first prize at the Moscow Film Festival in July and is being advertised in Moscow under the slogan "with a swastika on his sleeve and Torah in his heart," has provoked an angry reaction among local Jews. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

**Jewish environmental education, once marginal, gaining a foothold**

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Gavriel Goldman is standing in a park in the Rocky Mountains, a few yards from the white water of the Poudre River.

Gesturing to a pine tree beside him, Goldman, an energetic middle-aged man with a slight drawl and long blond hair, says, "Do you know, it's never stated in the Bible what kind of tree the tree of life was?"

Why not, he suggests, have a group of Hebrew school or day school students look up all the words in the midrash used to describe the famous Garden of Eden tree and then go to the woods to find the tree of life?

How about using a trip to the forest as a springboard for talking about family trees, or to discuss the section of Psalm 92 comparing righteous people to date palms and cedar trees?

"We tend to shove things up here too much," he says, pointing to his head.

"If you want to get to the feeling part of Judaism, nothing is better than nature."

Around him, a group of people, gathered in Colorado for the conference of the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education in nearby Fort Collins, nod their heads and murmur approvingly.

Goldman — the director of the New Jersey YMHA-YWHA's Jewish Nature Center — has become the unofficial dean of a small but flourishing movement: Jewish environmental nature education.

Consider these recent developments:

- For the first time ever, this year's CAJE conference offered a full track — 23 sessions — on Jewish environmental education. Attended by 700 different people — more than a third of the entire conference — the sessions ranged from a field trip to Poudre Canyon to "Teaching God in Nature" to "Contemporary Environmental Issues as Seen Through Jewish Tradition" to "Ecology and Kabbalah: Restoring Cosmic Blessing."

- Jewish nature centers have sprung up in the past decade in such places as the New York area; New Jersey; Malibu, Calif., and — most recently — near Atlanta. The oldest, the Teva Learning Center — which has facilities in upstate New York and the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts, offers educational retreats for students at almost 40 day schools in the northeast. Others like the Shalom Nature Center in California run an environmental day camp and extensive programming for college students.

- In a two-year-old program funded by the New York-based Nathan Cummings Foundation, more than 20 college students and recent graduates have been trained to teach about Judaism and nature at Jewish summer camps.

- Goldman and others are in discussion with several Jewish seminaries as well as the Jewish community center movement to create a graduate program that would lead to a masters degree in Jewish education and a certificate in environmental education.

On the one hand, Jewish environmental and nature education is about using outdoor activities like hiking and wilderness retreats to engage people in discussions about God and Torah.

But it is also about teaching people to care for the earth, using traditional Jewish concepts such as bal tashchit.

The Teva Learning Center, for example, does both, starting its

program for sixth-grade day school students with an "awareness curriculum" that consists of exploring in the woods, while talking about Jewish blessings and prayers that express appreciation for nature.

"In day schools, kids have been saying these blessings forever and often it's become stale for them," says Nili Simhai, co-director of Teva. "Often, by the time they're hitting the teen years they're getting resentful of having to do it, and this puts a new spirit into it.

"This is a chance to say to kids that when we read this psalm and it talks about the glory of the mountains dancing, the person who wrote it wasn't inside mumbling it under his breath, but outside saying, Wow," Simhai says.

From awareness and blessings, the sixth graders move on to concepts like ecological cycles and bal tashchit, the idea that humans have a responsibility to care for the earth.

"We also talk to them about community and Jewish wisdom, about how to treat other human beings as well as the planet," Simhai says. "The most important thing we try to do is give them a sense of connection to their planet and to their tradition at the same time."

The Shalom Nature Center's college programs have a less structured curriculum.

Kendra Striegler, a student at the University of California at Los Angeles, went on the center's weeklong canoe trip down the Colorado River last spring.

"What was really cool about it was if anyone doubted there was a creator before that trip, no way would they still," Striegler says. "The experiences we had were so amazing that it just couldn't have happened by chance," she says, marveling over the "formations of rock, the way the sun would set over the valley, the whiteness of the sand on the sandbars."

Striegler, who grew up in a very secular household and recently became more interested in Judaism, says the trip's leaders would "take Jewish issues and apply it to the natural world, but it wasn't, like, Let's study Torah. We used Torah in what we were doing, but it wasn't the focus — it was just applied."

Next summer, the center will launch the Shalom Outdoor Leadership School — SOuLS — for college students and recent grads, a program that will teach wilderness skills as well as Torah and Talmud. But while the field is growing, American Jewish life and its educational institutions have not gone completely green.

The CAJE conference may have had sessions on Jewish environmental education, but the dining hall still served each meal on styrofoam plates.

And one has only to look at the carpool line waiting outside most suburban Hebrew schools and day schools to spot a fair number of gas-guzzling Sport Utility Vehicles.

At the end of the Teva retreat, the kids pledge to make environmentally conscious changes in their own lives — like not running the tap water while they brush their teeth — and plan an environmental class project, like planting a garden together or reducing the amount of Styrofoam the school uses.

But the class projects — often unrealistically ambitious, like getting all disposable dishes out of the school cafeteria — have had mixed success. To help, Teva hopes soon to hire a full-time staff person to work more closely with schools after the retreat program.

"What's toughest for kids is coming back, then having to deal with things like speaking with the principal or writing letters, very adult things," says Simhai. □