



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bus ambushed in West Bank

At least 9 Israelis were killed when Palestinian gunmen opened fire on a bus in the West Bank.

At least 30 others were wounded after the gunmen threw a grenade at the bus and raked it with gunfire, ambulance workers and witnesses said.

The ambush took place Wednesday near the Israeli settlement of Immanuel.

Gunmen continued firing at the bus after rescue forces made their way to the scene.

In another attack, two Palestinian suicide bombers killed only themselves when they blew themselves up near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

The bombers set off their explosives Wednesday on a main highway near Neveh Dekalim.

At least four people in two cars were wounded in the attack.

Israel responded to the attacks by launching airstrikes on targets in the West Bank and Gaza.

Jewish militants arrested

The leader of the Jewish Defense League was arrested.

Irv Rubin, 56, and a member of the militant group, Earl Krugel, 59, were booked Wednesday in connection with a failed bombing plot. [Page 4]

U.S. presses Hezbollah backers

The United States is pressing Lebanon and Syria to clamp down on Hezbollah.

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said on Arabic-language TV that Hezbollah is responsible for problems throughout the Middle East.

The time has come for Syria to cut its connections with terror organizations, she added.

Prayer law declared illegal

Louisiana's school prayer law was declared unconstitutional.

A U.S. appeals court on Tuesday upheld a 1999 ruling striking down the law.

The state had asked the appeals court to reinstate the law.

A 1976 Louisiana law initially allowed for silent meditation. It was amended in 1992 to include the word "prayer" instead of "meditation," and again in 1999 to remove the word "silent." Louisiana may file further appeals.

NEWS ANALYSIS

As pressure grows, Israelis debate the prospect of a post-Arafat world

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For the first time, Israeli political debate is focusing openly on the prospect of life after Yasser Arafat.

This follows a marked drop in the Palestinian Authority president's international standing — in the eyes not just of the United States but also among other key members of the international community.

While the world is not yet writing off Arafat, Israelis on all points of the political spectrum seem to feel it is both legitimate and practical to debate the prospect of Arafat's possible — and perhaps imminent — removal from power.

If such a scenario does come about, it is not likely to be as a result of direct Israeli intervention.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who returned from a visit to the United States in early December, has told his aides that he was asked for, and gave, a firm commitment to President Bush that Israel would not kill Arafat or otherwise harm him personally.

The prime minister's vow apparently extends to the idea — floated by some Israeli hawks — of deporting Arafat or barring him from returning to the country when he goes off on one of his many jaunts abroad.

Israeli missiles destroyed two of Arafat's helicopters in an attack in the Gaza Strip last week.

Warplanes bombed a compound close to his Ramallah headquarters while he was working inside.

But these attacks were intended more as warnings than as serious efforts to strike at Arafat himself.

Later in the week, Sharon indicated that he was liable to turn down a request from Arafat to fly to Qatar for a gathering of Islamic foreign ministers.

"He is too busy arresting terrorists," Sharon sarcastically told the Cabinet. Perhaps to save himself the risk of humiliation, Arafat decided not to make the request.

Sharon has disclosed to Time magazine that he recently sent his son, Omri, on a secret mission to assure Arafat that he faces no physical danger from Israel.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Tuesday that Israel was not trying to topple Arafat as head of the Palestinian Authority.

But he warned that unless Arafat acts firmly to stop terrorism, he runs the risk of being deposed by Palestinian extremists.

"Arafat made mistakes but it is not for Israel to decide who will lead the Palestinians," Peres told a news conference following talks in Rome with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

"We are not going to dismantle the Palestinian Authority nor topple Arafat, but we demand he take responsibility" to end the violence, he said.

For Sharon, the issue is not Arafat's personal safety but his political future. Sharon has been warned repeatedly, both by Palestinians, foreign experts and some Israelis, that military pressure on the Palestinian Authority could weaken Arafat's rule to a point where it simply implodes.

To judge by his responses and by the Israel army's operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Sharon is prepared at least to consider that scenario.

The Israeli prime minister wants to force the Palestinian leader to confront the fundamentalist factions in the Palestinian territories, make sweeping arrests of known militants and hold and interrogate those incarcerated, instead of letting them walk free

MIDEAST FOCUS

Four gunmen killed in Gaza

Palestinian militants vowed revenge after Israeli helicopters killed four Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip. Responding to what Israel called fire from a "terrorist squad," the helicopters opened fire early Wednesday morning on targets near the Khan Yunis refugee camp. Palestinian sources said those assassinated were members of the Abu Rish Brigades, an armed, breakaway faction of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah group.

Israeli declared MIA

An Israeli reservist was declared missing in action. Staff Sgt. Ronen Rozen, 33, left his Netanya home on Nov. 25 wearing his army uniform and carrying a weapon. He has not been seen since.

SLA refugees return home

More than 400 former members of the South Lebanon Army returned to Lebanon from Israel in the last month, U.N. sources said. The SLA men and their families were given asylum when Israeli troops withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000. Criticizing their living conditions, more than 2,200 SLA members have since gone home.

Domestic Israeli travel on rise

Increasing numbers of Israelis are traveling within the country. According to Israeli Tourism Minister Binyamin Elon, Israeli domestic travel has increased by 50 percent over last year's levels.

Elon also told JTA during a visit to New York that international travel by Israelis has fallen by 50 percent in the past year. He credited the change in travel destinations to a marketing campaign launched by his ministry to encourage domestic travel.

While in New York, Elon told Jewish leaders that if U.S. Jews stop visiting Israel, then Palestinian terrorists will have won.

after a few days. If that means a situation approaching a Palestinian civil war — from which Arafat emerges diminished or even defeated — then so be it, Sharon seems to be saying.

Significantly, the prime minister has taken issue with the conventional Israeli wisdom that if Arafat falls, more radical forces will seize power.

Sharon suggested in several conversations this week that Arafat's fall might throw up more moderate leaders with whom Israel could deal more productively.

Even if it doesn't, Sharon said, it might be better for Israel to deal with a group like Hamas — which makes no secret of its intention to attack Israel — than with Arafat, whose moderate words allegedly mask a more belligerent agenda.

After decades of confrontations and broken promises, Sharon has no patience left for Arafat, whom he invariably refers to as "that terrorist."

Moreover, both from his recent meeting at the White House and from American pronouncements, Sharon knows that the Bush Administration also has little patience left for what he regards as Arafat's lies.

Israeli sources say the American peace envoy in the region, ex-Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, has been scathing in his expressions of frustration with Arafat.

But the Bush administration stops short of actually calling for pulling the plug on Arafat. Washington's policy is still predicated on its expectation that Arafat can and will rein in the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terror networks.

However deep their distaste for the Palestinian leader, therefore, Israeli policy-makers are toeing that same line.

Yet they have even less confidence than the Americans in Arafat's ability or desire to take serious action.

A significant advance this week came from an unexpected quarter — the European Union. In an unwontedly sharp criticism of the Palestinians, the E.U. demanded that Arafat dismantle the Hamas and Islamic Jihad "terrorist networks" and also declare — in Arabic, to his own people — an end to the violence that has raged for the past 14 months.

Clearly influenced by public horror over the wave of suicide bombings that hit Israel in early December, the E.U. foreign ministers insisted that Arafat arrest terror suspects and bring them to justice.

They also urged Israel to withdraw its forces from Palestinian areas, end closures on Palestinian cities, stop assassinating Palestinian terrorists and freeze Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Given the E.U.'s traditional sympathy for the Palestinian position, Israeli officials took the statement as a sign of Arafat's eroding international standing.

But not everyone in Israel relishes that prospect.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and others on the left warn that Arafat's downfall would mean a hardening of the Palestinian line, given the steady rise in support for Hamas among the Palestinian public.

This camp argues that Sharon and the right want to see hard-liners win out among the Palestinians, so that Israel will not have to negotiate — and make concessions — in the foreseeable future.

One possible outcome of the new Israeli debate may be a strengthening of the "unilateralist" option.

A small group, led by ex-Labor ministers Haim Ramon and Shlomo Ben-Ami, argues that Israel should withdraw unilaterally from large parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, dismantle settlements there, and build a border fence to seal off the Jewish state from the terrorist threat.

The unilateralists argue that, having rejected the Clinton peace package last year, Arafat effectively has closed off the negotiating option as long as the Palestinian leader remains in power.

Therefore, they say, Israel should act alone to better defend itself.

Yet the argument has gained little foothold among most politicians, who argue that the political trauma of dismantling settlements would be possible only within the context of real peacemaking.

Others dismiss the idea of unilateral withdrawal as foolhardy, noting that even after shrinking its borders — and giving up its negotiating assets — Israel will not be able to prevent Palestinian terrorists from entering the country. □

(JTA correspondent Ruth E. Gruber in Rome contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

D.C. neo-Nazi march planned

A neo-Nazi group is going to march in Washington. The National Alliance is planning to rally outside the Israeli Embassy this Saturday.

Local Jewish and civil rights groups are asking community members to stay away from the protest and instead donate to causes that counter the message of hate groups.

U.S. seeks to deport Nazi guard

The U.S. Dept. of Justice is trying to deport a New York man who served as a Nazi camp guard.

The department's Office of Special Investigations alleges that Mykola Wasyluk, 78, served as an armed guard at slave labor camps in Poland where thousands of Jews were incarcerated.

In July, a U.S. court agreed to strip Wasyluk of his citizenship because of his World War II activities.

Islamic group banned in Germany

Germany banned a radical Islamic group. Interior Minister Otto Schily said Wednesday that action against the group, known in English as the Caliphate State, was necessary to stop what he called their extremist activities.

He also accused the group of threatening domestic security. Police said they conducted 200 house searches in seven different German states in connection with the ban and seized the Cologne headquarters of the group, which has an estimated 1,100 followers.

Russian synagogue gets security

U.S. Jews are giving money for 24-hour security at a Russian synagogue.

A Chicago affiliate of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union is donating \$6,000 for the synagogue in the city of Tyumen.

The synagogue has been vandalized seven times in the past year.

Best Jewish books selected

Eight authors merited multiple selections on a list of the top 100 works of modern Jewish literature.

The Yiddish writers S.Y. Abramovitch, S. An-ski, Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer are among the eight on the list, which was selected by a group of scholars under the auspices of the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass.

The Hebrew writer S.Y. Agnon, the American writers Saul Bellow and Philip Roth — as well as Franz Kafka, who wrote in German — also were listed more than once.

The center is planning a series of events related to the list, including issuing translations of selected books. The entire list of 100 is available at www.yiddishbookcenter.org.

Rewards offered for information on Palestinian killers of Americans

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The State Department is asking American families whose relatives were killed by Palestinian terrorists for permission to post their stories — along with rewards for information — on the Internet.

Between 50 and 60 letters are being sent to families of Americans killed by Palestinian violence.

The letters from James Larocco, principal deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, say the government will offer "substantial monetary rewards" for information leading to the arrest or conviction of people responsible for acts of terrorism.

"The Rewards for Justice program has proven to be an effective incentive for those with information about terrorist attacks and has helped bring many terrorists to justice," Larocco wrote.

Stephen Flatow has already returned the consent form. His daughter, Alisa, was killed in April 1995 when a suicide bomber affiliated with Islamic Jihad blew up a bus near Kfar Darom, a settlement in the Gaza Strip.

The 20-year-old from West Orange, N.J., was taking a break from her studies at Brandeis University to visit Israel.

Until the recent State Department decision, Flatow said, he had felt there was a "double standard" between efforts to apprehend those who kill Americans in other parts of the world and Palestinians who attack Americans.

"We always felt we were being treated like the foster kids," he said.

While the FBI investigated his daughter's death, no efforts were made to seek the 12 members of Islamic Jihad linked to the attack, he said.

"Some are still walking the streets of the West Bank and Gaza," Flatow said.

State Department officials say the decision to broaden the rewards program is not a response to the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington, but had been under consideration for months as the administration weighed the legalities.

In Sept. 2000, the State Department said it did not want to post rewards for information on Americans killed in the Middle East because of efforts by Israel and the Palestinian Authority to apprehend suspects. At that time, 60 of 65 suspects accused of killing Americans between 1994 and 1998 were either dead or in Israeli or Palestinian custody, the State Department said.

However, the last year of violence — when the Palestinian Authority released many prisoners from its jails — forced the United States to change tactics, officials said.

Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America, said that in other parts of the world the U.S. government actively seeks information related to the deaths of Americans, including advertising in print and broadcast media and on billboards, matchboxes and elsewhere.

"We are urging the State Department to try to capture these killers in the same way they do in other countries," said Klein, who has been one of the most prominent advocates on the issue. "Simply having it all on a Web site is not the same as having it in the Palestinian media."

Still, the inclusion on the Web site is a first step that ZOA and other American Jewish groups have been seeking for some time.

"The fact that America recognizes that there are evil people not just in Afghanistan and Pakistan but in the Middle East is a terrific statement by the Bush administration," Flatow said.

In recent weeks, the Bush administration has made significant strides to combat terrorism in the Middle East. Bush assured American Jewish leaders Monday that Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad eventually will be targeted by the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism, and the Treasury Department recently shut down three U.S. organizations with financial links to Hamas.

The Web site already lists other terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind behind the Sept. 11 attacks on America.

The site is expected to be updated within weeks, once the State Department receives consent forms from a sufficient number of families. □

Jewish militants arrested in L.A. for plotting to bomb Arab targets

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The national chairman of the Jewish Defense League and a fellow member of the militant group have been charged with conspiracy to blow up Arab and Muslim targets in Southern California.

Federal authorities charged at a press conference Wednesday that JDL Chairman Irv Rubin, 56, and Earl Krugel, 59, intended to blow up the King Fahd Mosque and the offices of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, both in Los Angeles, and the offices of Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.).

Issa, whose district includes parts of San Diego and Orange counties, is an Arab American of Lebanese descent. He is one of the more vocal critics of Israel in Congress.

Leading Jewish organizations strongly condemned the alleged plot. A press conference was scheduled for later in the day.

"We are saddened that members of our own Jewish community would resort to the use of violence against Arab and Muslim Americans," said Bonnie Lipton, president of Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America. "No grievance, dispute or political argument can ever justify these tactics."

U.S. Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), a vocal critic of Arab terrorism, denounced the alleged JDL plot.

"As a member of Congress who happens to be Jewish, I want to take special pains to condemn this potential act of domestic terrorism," Ackerman said. "No political cause can justify the murder of innocents, whether the cause is Palestinian, Jewish or that of any other group."

As outlined by U.S. Attorney John Gordon and Ronald Iden of the local FBI office, an informant reported attending a meeting with Rubin and Krugel in October, during which he was asked to help bomb the alleged targets.

According to the complaint, Krugel commented during the meeting that Arabs "need a wake-up call." Rubin allegedly said the JDL needed to let people know that it was "alive in a militant way."

In subsequent meetings, the informant was told to locate and photograph the offices of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and to buy some of the bomb components, including pipes and explosive powder.

Last weekend, authorities say, Rubin and Krugel told the informant that the target would not be the MPAC office but the King Fahd Mosque and Issa's office.

On Tuesday, the informant allegedly delivered explosive powder, the last component needed to construct pipe bombs, to Krugel's house.

In the evening, Rubin and Krugel had dinner at a local deli. Rubin was arrested about 9 p.m. while driving to his home in Monrovia. Krugel was arrested at his home in Reseda, Calif.

A neighbor of Krugel reported that law enforcement officers broke through fences and a screen door at Krugel's house and carried away weapons and cardboard boxes. A menorah was visible through the window, the neighbor said.

Rubin's attorney, Peter Morris, said, "Irv Rubin never had anything to do with explosives. It seems to us that, given the timing," the government's action is "part of an overreaction to the Sept. 11" terror attacks on New York and Washington.

Morris' partner, Bryan Altman, claimed that federal authorities wanted to demonstrate their "even-handedness" by balancing

terrorist charges against Muslims with similar charges against Jews.

Rubin and Krugel face charges of conspiracy to destroy a building by means of explosives and of possessing a destructive device related to a violent crime.

The first count carries a penalty of at least 30 years in prison, while the second has a maximum sentence of five years, according to Thom Mrozek, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Rubin, a native of Canada but a longtime California resident, was named national chairman of the militant JDL in 1985 by its founder, the late Rabbi Meir Kahane. At the time, Rubin said his first priority was "to teach every Jew self-defense" through free classes in martial arts and weapons use.

Rubin and the JDL were involved in numerous high-profile confrontations and received extensive media coverage in the 1980s and early 1990s, but in recent years have garnered few headlines.

Jewish organizations, including the local Jewish federation, the Anti-Defamation League and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, expressed their horror at the alleged plot. □

Chanukah menorahs lit up from Moscow to Ground Zero

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Unexpected chilly weather did not prevent roughly 1,000 people from gathering just a few hundred yards from the Kremlin for a Chanukah candlelighting.

Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov told the throngs Sunday night that the menorah near the Kremlin symbolizes the multicultural and multireligious city Moscow has become.

Luzhkov then helped Lev Levayev, a Lubavitch supporter and the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union — the largest Jewish group there — light the first Chanukah candle.

Israel's ambassador to Moscow, Nathan Meron, addressed the crowd.

"Next year," he joked, "inside the Kremlin."

The celebration was part of a worldwide candlelighting celebration sponsored by the Lubavitch movement. Candlelightings took place at the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Western Wall in Jerusalem and Ground Zero in New York. Those three events were streamed live over the Web at virtualhanukkah.com.

In Kiev, the president of Ukraine praised the Jewish community's role in the country. In a meeting Monday with Levayev, Leonid Kuchma pledged to help return Jewish communal property.

After the meeting at the presidential palace in Kiev, Kuchma lit a Chanukah menorah as 35 Lubavitch rabbis looked on. "To see the president light the menorah together with Mr. Levayev in the presidential palace" is a "miracle of Chanukah in our days," said Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzki, the chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk.

In Washington, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz lit the national Chanukah menorah. Hundreds attended Sunday's event, which was sponsored by American Friends of Lubavitch. The menorah, which stands on the Ellipse in front of the White House, has been lit each Chanukah for the past 22 years.

Other public candlelighting ceremonies took place around the world.

A mile away from the Kremlin celebration, several hundred Jewish students and youngsters gathered at a hall in downtown Moscow for a Chanukah celebration sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Reform movement in Russia. □