



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Shoe bomber visited Israel

The man who tried to blow up an American Airlines flight over the weekend visited Israel earlier this year. According to a report in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, British national Richard Reid also visited Egypt and Turkey.

Israeli security services and the FBI are investigating the purpose of Reid's stop in Israel seven months ago. Army Radio reported that Reid was detained briefly at Ben-Gurion airport. This past weekend, Reid attempted to set off explosives in his shoe on a Paris-Miami flight.

Sharon: Terror is down

Ariel Sharon said terror is down because of pressure put on Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

In remarks broadcast on Israel Radio, the Israeli prime minister repeated that as long as terror continues, there would not be diplomatic negotiations with the Palestinians, only contacts on arranging a cease-fire. Sharon said that when negotiations resume, he would lead them, in cooperation with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Israeli barred from terror post

Israel's High Court barred a former Shin Bet official from serving as Prime Minister Sharon's adviser on counterterrorism.

The court ruled that Ehud Yatom was ineligible for the post over his involvement in the killing of two Palestinian terrorists in 1984 who were captured after hijacking an Egged bus. Yatom also committed perjury but was never tried, and later received a pardon from President Chaim Herzog.

Israel extends Arafat ban

Israel extended a travel ban on Yasser Arafat to include next month's Greek Orthodox Christmas mass. The Palestinian Authority president was denied permission to travel to Bethlehem for Christmas mass, because he has not done enough to control Palestinian terrorism against Israel. The decision received international criticism, including from the United States, who raised concerns with the Israeli government.

"We regret the Israeli government's decision to deny Chairman Arafat permission to travel to Bethlehem to join the Christmas ceremony as he has in past years," a State Department spokesman said.

Florida Jewish community incensed as news of cemetery scandal breaks

By Paul Carson

PALM BEACH, Fla. (JTA) — As the shock begins to wear off from allegations that Menorah Gardens Cemetery desecrated hundreds of graves, the Jewish community's tears are hardening into anger.

"If everything that is being reported turns out to be factually true, this becomes a wake-up call of tremendous proportions," said Rabbi Sholom Ciment of Chabad-Lubavitch of Greater Boynton Beach.

The allegations against the cemetery, he said, warrant "an immediate and severe crackdown on all area Jewish cemeteries and funeral homes."

A lawsuit seeking class-action status alleges that Menorah Gardens mishandled hundreds of bodies. Two state agencies are looking into civil and criminal charges.

The lawsuit alleges that Menorah Gardens' parent company, Houston-based Service Corporation International, oversold space at its Palm Beach County cemetery and another cemetery in Broward County. The lawsuit also claims remains were buried in the wrong places or in ways that encroached on other plots. Some remains allegedly were discarded or replaced with other bodies to cover mistakes and make more room.

At synagogues across the county, rabbis took phone calls from congregants.

"I can't even count the number of calls," said Rabbi Alan Sherman, director of the chaplaincy program at the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County.

Rabbi Stephen Pinsky said his congregation, Temple Beth Torah in Wellington, has received "several" calls from concerned members who have plots in the Beth Torah section of the cemetery. After talking with Menorah Gardens officials, Pinsky said he believes the synagogue's section is not one of the areas in question.

Pinsky said temple officials have been telling members to call cemetery officials directly with questions or concerns. In addition, the rabbi has consoled members by assuring them that what counts most is their continued love and respect for the deceased.

But that is small comfort to Leslie Kolins. As soon as she heard about the lawsuit, Kolins drove from West Palm Beach to Menorah to check on the gravesites of her grandfather and uncle, who are both buried at the Palm Beach Gardens cemetery.

"It just sickens me that there's that possibility" that her relatives' bodies were mishandled, she said. "Even though we checked, there's talk that those may not be the same people that were originally buried there."

Two days after the allegations were made public, officials at the cemetery met with county rabbis to begin dealing with the situation, Sherman said.

"They were very anxious to establish a dialogue with the rabbis. They didn't need us to tell them the community's concerns — the community has already let them know," said Pinsky, who also serves as the president of the Palm Beach County Board of Rabbis.

But Sherman said Menorah didn't call the meeting until late Thursday night, Dec. 20. The meeting was set for 9 o'clock the following morning. Only eight of more than 30 invited spiritual leaders showed up, Sherman said.

He said Menorah officials did little to assuage concerns.

Pinsky said it is clear the company had just begun looking into the accusations. He said officials from SCI headquarters plan to visit with area synagogues in the next few weeks to address concerns directly. SCI officials will let board members know their schedule after the holidays, he said.

But family members say an admission of guilt won't be enough to end the scandal. Many people interviewed at the cemetery said they are desperate for reassurance that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Peace talks may resume

Israeli-Palestinian contacts are expected to resume soon.

Palestinian sources said the contacts between Ahmed Karia and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres would resume over the weekend, Israel Radio reported.

Karia and Palestinian official Yasser Abed Rabbo held talks in Cairo with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher.

Palestinian killed in Jenin

Israel arrested eight Hamas members in the West Bank. The arrests early Thursday morning were made in the Palestinian-controlled part of the city of Hebron.

U.S.: Syria willing to stop terror

Syria reportedly said it will look into ways to shut down terrorist organizations operating out of Damascus.

American officials informed Israel of the new Syrian position after Jerusalem raised the problem of terror in Syria and Lebanon during strategic talks with the United States two weeks ago, Ha'aretz reported.

Some U.S. officials reportedly are becoming more receptive to Israel's request that the United States put Lebanon on its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

These sources believe the threat of being added to the list could persuade Lebanon to take a tougher line with Hezbollah.

Israelis fear chemical attack

Some two-thirds of the Israeli public fear they or their families will be hurt by chemical or biological weapons used by the Palestinians.

The survey by a Hebrew University researcher also found that 57 percent of the Israeli public supports dismantling most of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of a peace agreement.



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their loved ones are or will soon be resting in peace.

Further complicating matters, Menorah closed its gates on the Sabbath immediately following the lawsuit, turning away dozens of would-be mourners.

According to Sherman, officials at Menorah said the company wanted to "respect Jewish custom."

"They don't know there is nothing in Jewish law that prohibits visiting a grave on the Sabbath," he said.

Some say ignorance of Jewish custom is one thing; ignorance of body desecration is dubious. Michael Jacobson, a Palm Beach County funeral director, said that someone at SCI had to know that something was going on.

"You can't move around bodies in the middle of the night and management doesn't know anything," Jacobson said.

According to Jacobson and Sherman, Jeff Frucht is the general manager of local Menorah operations. He did not return calls.

SCI spokesman Terry Hemeyer said the company is "taking the allegations seriously, and we are conducting an internal investigation with all possible diligence."

Concerned relatives have been conducting investigations of their own.

"In the last couple of days, a lot of people have asked me to do this," said Daniel Dickey, groundskeeper at Menorah Gardens in Palm Beach, as he pushed an eight-foot metal rod down into the earth to confirm the placement of a vault. "If it's there, that means it hasn't been removed and nothing's been destroyed."

Meanwhile, Sherman cautioned the local Jewish community to bear in mind that the case is still under investigation.

"We need to wait until all the facts are in," he said. To those concerned about the allegations, he advised, "Go to the cemetery and ask to see the grave and to see the records."

That's exactly what Mitchell Heide of Boca Raton did. When he heard of the allegations, he drove to Menorah's Palm Beach grounds. Heide said he came to take a photo of his father-in-law's headstone, which he hadn't seen since his burial.

"Nothing is sacred anymore," Heide said. "It always takes a tragedy and the media to get hold of it until a corrective action is taken. Time will tell."

Ciment said reverence for the dead is an integral part of Jewish custom.

"The Torah directs us with specific rules and regulations as to how best to esteem and honor our dead in the most sacred means of preparation for burial, the funeral service, the burial and mourning period," he said. "No one in their wildest nightmare would have ever thought that the cemeteries, to which we have entrusted our dead, would so wantonly desecrate that which they have been explicitly contracted to do."

Even so, both Sherman and Ciment agreed that giving up the time-honored Jewish prohibition against cremation is not a solution.

"This is about the way" SCI "ran things, not whether people were buried or cremated," Sherman said.

Both men also dismissed suggestions to have the shomer, or "guard," stand vigil over the body for a longer period.

"Who can be at the cemetery 24/7 making sure that an agency who has been entrusted, contracted and paid to take perpetual care of our deceased would be the perpetrators themselves?" Ciment asked.

According to Rabbi Pinchas Weberman, president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of South Florida, Jewish law requires that all parts of the body — even the blood from a murder scene — be buried together.

Weberman added that Jewish law notes three objections to disinterment: It disturbs the soul, exposes the body and "embarrasses" the neighboring corpses.

But for the most part, Rabbi Steven Westman of Temple Beth El in West Palm Beach said those he has consoled have been more interested in information about their loved ones' status than in spiritual regulations.

"It's a pragmatic situation," said the rabbi, who said he believes the lawsuit may be unfounded. "I'm telling people to just sit tight and see how it plays out." □

The law firm Greenspoon, Marder, Hirschfeld, Rafkin, Ross & Berger, P.A., which filed the lawsuit against Menorah Gardens Cemetery, has created a hotline at (866) 476-7400 to provide the latest information on the legal action. Callers can also discuss joining the lawsuit.

Information on the case also can be accessed at www.cemeteryclaims.com.

JEWISH WORLD

Experts: Bin Laden uses Palestine

Osama bin Laden uses the Palestine issue in his latest video to rally support in the Arab world, experts said. "Palestine is the only unifying issue in the Arab world, so he has to widen his vision and include something that really touches everybody," Reuters quoted Abdel Bar-Atwan, the editor of the London-based Al-Quds newspaper, as saying.

Stalin admirers bash Jews

Speakers at a recent Moscow event commemorating the 122nd birthday of Stalin distributed anti-Semitic literature and blasted "Zionists."

Some of the literature included the "real" Jewish names of Russian politicians, including the claim that President Vladimir Putin's last name is the Jewish-sounding Shalomov, according to the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

Vandals hit Russian synagogue

Vandals painted swastikas on the walls of a Russian synagogue. The vandals who attacked the synagogue in the city of Krasnoyarsk also painted the words "RNU," the acronym for Russia's largest neo-Nazi group. Local police are investigating the incident.

Sholem Aleichem gets monument

A monument to Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem was unveiled Wednesday in Moscow. The monument stands near the site of the former Moscow Jewish Theater. That theater, which staged plays written by Sholem Aleichem, was torn down on Stalin's orders.

German refugee leader quits

The head of an organization for German refugees recently quit after expressing doubts about the number of people murdered at Auschwitz.

The resignation of Paul Latussek, a leader of the Organization for Refugees, was described as "the best way to secure" the group's future, a spokesperson for the group said.

The Organization for Refugees represents Germans expelled from Nazi-occupied lands after the end of World War II. It is illegal to deny the Holocaust in Germany, and state prosecutors reportedly are looking into the possibility of filing charges against Latussek.

Jewish book guides available

The National Yiddish Book Center will publish monthly guides for Jewish books starting in January.

The Amherst, Mass., museum's free guides will feature a different literary work each month and provide essays, study questions and interviews with the author. The first book is Michael Chabon's "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay." Materials are available at www.jewishreader.org.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

With anti-Semitism rising in France, more Jews considering emigrating

By Andrew Diamond

PARIS (JTA) — With French Jews complaining about a rise in anti-Semitic violence, there appears to be a sharp increase in the number of people inquiring about immigrating to Israel.

After several years of declining aliyah from France, the Jewish Agency for Israel has seen a 30 to 40 percent rise in inquiries this fall, according to the director of its French office, Dov Puder.

"It is too early to know how many immigrants we will have for the year 2001, but usually the fall is a down time for applications, and March and April are the busiest months," Puder explained. "This is why this year is remarkable."

According to the French publication *Alyah Magazine*, the Jewish Agency's French desk could expect between 2,000 and 3,000 immigrants every year through the late 1990s. That number fell to 1,950 in 1998 and 1,515 the following year.

Figures for 2000 are unavailable, but Puder says there was an additional decline.

As of today, 1,150 French Jews have emigrated to Israel in 2001. The recent increase in inquiries will not make a statistical impact until next year.

Regardless of the numbers, the typical profile of the applicant has changed very little, Puder said. French aliyah candidates tend to be very religious, and predominantly families with children.

Yet Puder did note a change in the reasons people came to his office.

"They are motivated by the situation in France as much as the situation in Israel," he said, "but they are more concerned than in the past with the situation in France."

Puder was hesitant to call the new candidates "worried" by the recent anti-Semitism, suggesting merely that they are "bothered" by it.

Moreover, he claimed that many of those interviewed recently emphasized their children's education as a reason for moving to Israel.

The increase in potential emigrants coincides with a recent rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the Paris region and Marseilles. As of Nov. 15, French police had recorded 26 violent acts and 115 incidents of intimidation against Jews in 2001, according to the Ministry of the Interior. CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular Jewish groups throughout France, claims the number is even higher.

The issue of anti-Semitism recently has become headline news in the French media, but many Jewish leaders feel the Socialist-led government has yet to take meaningful action. Speaking at the annual CRIF dinner at the beginning of December, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin assured Jewish notables of "the determination of the government to fight against all forms of anti-Semitism."

Yet many in the community have grown disheartened that Interior Minister Daniel Vaillant — the man most responsible for national law enforcement policy — has continuously disputed the seriousness of the threats French Jews face on a daily basis.

Vaillant long has claimed that most anti-Semitic violence is carried out by Muslim youths from low-income neighborhoods, which few dispute. But Jewish leaders increasingly are concerned about the consequences of the anti-Semitic aggression.

Enrollment in Jewish schools has climbed over the past few years, a phenomenon that speaks to growing tensions between Muslim and Jewish youths. However, many middle-class Jewish families who share their neighborhoods with Maghrebins — Muslims of North African descent — are unable to afford the rising cost of private education. □

Israeli youth live in poverty

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One-fourth of all Israeli children live in poverty.

According to the National Council for the Child's annual report, 480,000 children, not including residents of eastern Jerusalem, currently live below the poverty line. According to the report, there were more than 2.1 million children living in Israel last year, a third of the population. □

Federation system mobilizes to help Argentine Jews in need

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The North American Jewish federation system is being asked to contribute more than \$12 million over the next three years to help Argentinian Jews survive the country's economic crisis.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is holding an emergency meeting Jan. 2 with top leaders from the federations' umbrella organization, the United Jewish Communities, to discuss the rapidly changing situation in Argentina.

Argentina's approximately 200,000 Jews have been hit hard by the country's economic crisis, which erupted into street riots in which 25 people were killed earlier this month.

Traditionally middle class, a growing number of Argentine Jews — as many as 50,000 people, or a quarter of the community — has fallen below the poverty line in the past two years, according to estimates.

Argentina has a long history of anti-Semitism, but Jews apparently are not being singled out for attacks right now, according to a memo from the UJC.

Now, after riots forced the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa and a new and untested interim leader took his place, many Jews are seeking to emigrate to Israel. Others are looking at Europe, Latin America and North America.

In an ironic twist, some Argentine Jews whose grandparents fled Poland are now seeking to return there and reclaim citizenship.

The JDC initially requested \$10 million for Argentina three months ago, but leaders say the recent economic collapse has forced them to increase their estimates.

In addition, the Jewish Agency for Israel — which is trying to process increased applications for aliyah — faces new needs in Argentina. Together, the JDC and Jewish Agency receive approximately \$300 million a year from the federation system.

Stephen Hoffman, the UJC's president and CEO, said it is not yet clear how the federation system will respond to the call for help, and that it is currently working with the JDC, Jewish Agency and a few smaller agencies to get a better sense of the needs.

So far, he said, different players have provided conflicting reports about the scope of the Jewish community's needs.

In particular, Hoffman said, the UJC is seeking information on the capacity of Argentine Jewish institutions to meet community needs, what programs would generate "a significant number of people to consider Israel for resettlement," and "what kind of welfare assistance can be significant but also within our reach."

Several Jewish foundations have allocated money for Argentine Jews in the past few months, including \$400,000 in job training programs sponsored by the New York Jewish federation.

The JDC has invested \$1 million in emergency funds in the past few weeks, but says the money is running out.

The group is working to help "the very worst cases" of impoverished Jews and is providing cash assistance to help people pay rent and meet mortgage payments, said Michael Schneider, the JDC's executive vice president.

The JDC is providing cash subsidies and food assistance to over 11,000 Argentine Jews, according to Alberto Senderey, the group's director for community development in Europe and Latin America.

But far more Jews are in need, said Senderey, who is based in Paris but has visited Argentina monthly since September.

In the past few weeks, the Jewish community has been distributing food, clothing and other supplies through synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

However, due to the recent rioting and fears of provoking resentment against Jews — who have been hit as hard as other Argentines by the economic crisis — Jewish groups are switching from direct distribution of goods to providing "supermarket vouchers" so people can get supplies directly from stores.

"We don't want people to see us bringing food into Jewish buildings," Senderey said, explaining that many groups are worried about being looted.

As it is summer in Argentina, children are not in school and parents looking for jobs have to worry about child care. The JDC and local Jewish community centers are working to make day camps available to more families.

Distributing cash is difficult right now, Senderey said, because individuals are forbidden from withdrawing more than \$250 a month from the bank. Organizations also face restrictions on cash withdrawals.

"The banks are not working, the country is in confusion, there's a new temporary government and new economic rules nobody knows how to follow," Senderey said.

Many Argentine Jewish organizations have not paid employees' salaries in over two months, Senderey said.

In addition, they are having difficulty finding local volunteers to help with relief efforts because "everyone now has to stand hours in line in the bank to cash their own salary, so they have less time to volunteer." □

Israeli school in some hot water after teacher burns Christian Bible

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials have condemned a religious school for holding a public burning of the Christian Bible earlier this month. Israel's deputy foreign minister, Michael Melchior, called the act a desecration of God's name. He said in a statement this week that such acts could "harm our relationship with the Christian world."

"The Jewish people cannot and will not accept the burning of books holy to others," Melchior said. "We cannot do unto others what has been done to the Jews for generations."

The Orot school, located in Beit Shemesh, has apologized for burning the book, which apparently was given to a student by Christian missionaries.

"The intentions were not to criticize Christianity, but only to tell these Jewish boys they don't have to listen to the missionaries," said Jordana Klein, a spokeswoman for the school.

Israel's Education Ministry said it had summoned the school's principal, Rabbi Yair Bachar, for a disciplinary hearing.

The education ministry opened the inquiry after the story broke in the Jerusalem Post this week. According to the report, the incident took place in the school yard the week before Chanukah.

A teacher found out that a sixth-grade student had brought to school a Hebrew version of the New Testament that his family had received from missionaries. The teacher consulted with the school principal, who reportedly gave his approval for the burning. □