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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Paris Jewish school attacked

A Jewish school near Paris was attacked. Sunday's attack at the Ozar Hatorah school set one classroom on fire.

In a separate incident, three people were arrested for allegedly throwing rocks at a nearby synagogue.

No one was injured in either incident.

The European Jewish Congress condemned both attacks.

Iranian denies nuke comments

An Iranian leader denied that he called for Israel to be destroyed by nuclear weapons.

Former President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani said his comments were taken out of context.

The Jewish state has called on the United Nations to condemn Rafsanjani's remarks, made in a Dec. 14 speech.

Iran released a statement saying that Rafsanjani in his speech warned that if Israel continues to expand its nuclear arsenal, "then it will be Israel, a small and illegitimate country, which will lose out and be destroyed."

Sharon nixes president's speech

Ariel Sharon rejected a proposal for Israel's president to address Palestinian politicians.

President Moshe Katsav had welcomed the initiative but said he respected the prime minister's decision.

The proposal, raised by a former Arab Knesset member and an Israeli businessman, had suggested that Katsav give a speech before the Palestine legislative council in Ramallah calling for a yearlong cease-fire.

Israel arrests Palestinian

Israel arrested a Palestinian who illegally entered eastern Jerusalem without a permit.

Mustafa Barghouti, who heads a nongovernmental organization, was arrested after holding a news conference with European peace activists at the American Colony Hotel.

ADL's L.A. representative fired

Jewish leaders in Los Angeles are dismayed by the firing of the Anti-Defamation League's local representative. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Zinni's return will up the pressure on Israel, Palestinians to take steps

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Anthony Zinni's return to the Middle East will test the willingness of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to make sacrifices for a cease-fire.

The former Marine Corps general's first trip to the region was disrupted by several major suicide bombings that led the United States to exert unprecedented pressure on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to crack down on terrorism.

Zinni left the region late last month, apparently with little hope of negotiating a cease-fire. His return, however, is considered an acknowledgment by the United States that the Palestinians recently have made some progress in halting terror.

"What they see is that it's no longer a frozen situation," but an opportunity to resume negotiations, said Stephen Cohen, a scholar with the Israel Policy Forum. "He wants to see whether he can move it further."

While continuing to pressure Arafat to curb Palestinian violence, Zinni also is expected to pressure Israel to ease the Palestinians' economic crisis by ending closures on their cities and releasing tax revenue to the Palestinian Authority.

Word of Zinni's trip already had aggravated strains between the left- and right-wing elements in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unity government.

Sharon has insisted on a week without attacks before the sides begin implementing peace moves prescribed by two previous U.S. envoys, CIA Director George Tenet and former Sen. George Mitchell.

Yet Sharon's foreign minister, Shimon Peres, indicated that Israel might begin counting in a day or two if the reduced level of violence holds. In recent weeks, the number of Palestinian attacks on Israelis has fallen from roughly 20 to 10 a day.

Peres told a Foreign Ministry forum Wednesday that Arafat may become "relevant" again if he enforces a cease-fire.

A Security Cabinet decision in December declared Arafat "irrelevant" after two suicide bomb attacks in Haifa and Jerusalem killed 26 people in a 24-hour period.

Zinni originally went to the Middle East in November with a mandate, outlined by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, to bring the sides to take the necessary steps toward a lasting cease fire.

The Bush administration had begun using new language to entice the Palestinian Authority to come to the table, including the first explicit acknowledgments of U.S. support for an eventual Palestinian state.

Powell called on Israel to end its "occupation" of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip — a rare use of that term from a U.S. official — and to halt settlement growth. He called on the Palestinians to end anti-Israel violence and incitement.

When Zinni arrived, however, he was met by some of the worst violence of the 15-month-old intifada, including the attacks in Jerusalem and Haifa.

Zinni left the region with little enthusiasm for the prospects of peace. U.S. rhetoric toward Arafat and the Palestinian leadership became harsher, and organizations linked to Palestinian terrorist groups were targeted both in the United States and internationally.

However, since then Arafat has made some efforts to stop violence and control terrorist organizations.

Zinni's current trip, which will last less than a week and include no trilateral talks, will allow him to assess whether the situation is ripe for a second major push. "The facts

MIDEAST FOCUS

Temple Mount work halted

Islamic officials have stopped some work on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The halt came at the request of the Israeli government.

During the past few years, a group of Israelis has called on the government to halt work carried out by Islamic officials that the group claims has damaged Jewish artifacts on the Temple Mount.

P.A. offers money for jail time

A senior Palestinian security official reportedly tried to fake the jailing of Islamic militants.

A senior Palestinian security official reportedly offered \$3,000 to anyone willing to sit in jail for a month in place of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members, Israel Radio reported.

Israeli school may fire rabbi

An Israeli university may fire a rabbi who claimed that Shimon Peres bore moral responsibility for the Sept. 11 attacks.

The Technion is considering making the move after its rabbi, Eliyahu Zeini, wrote on the Web site of a right-wing radio station that Israel's foreign minister had legitimized terror by meeting with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, the "teacher and the rabbi of the murderer bin Laden," according to Israeli media reports.

Activist's murderer seeks parole

An Israeli parole board is considering early release for an Israeli who killed a peace activist.

The board on Wednesday considered a request by prisoner Yonah Avrushmi to reduce the life sentence he received for killing peace activist Emil Grunzweig, who died when Avrushmi threw a hand grenade at a Peace Now demonstration in 1984, the newspaper Ha'aretz reported.



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on the ground will determine what Zinni can do," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, who just returned from the Middle East. "You get such a totally different picture from being there."

A State Department spokesman said Zinni is returning to the region with the same mission — to take small steps toward a lasting cease-fire.

He said Zinni believes he had made some progress on his first trip before the suicide attacks interrupted everything.

The goal of this trip will be to move forward from that starting point, the spokesman said.

While the level of violence has gone down since Zinni left, there still are daily attacks.

"Clearly, things are happening," Hoenlein said. "There is a reduction, but it doesn't meet the requirement of a period of quiet, and there haven't been the arrests" of major terrorists that Israel has demanded.

The State Department says there has been a "relative reduction in violence," but that the Palestinian Authority "can and must do more."

In overnight consultations Tuesday, Sharon consented to an American request to ease restrictions on the Palestinians ahead of Zinni's arrival. But on Wednesday, Peres claimed that no concrete action had been taken on the ground.

Peres has urged Sharon to give Arafat incentives to continue a crackdown on terrorists. Right-wing elements in the government, however, say Arafat still is not making meaningful moves against the infrastructure of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and therefore Israel must keep the pressure on.

Sharon this week nixed an initiative for Israel's president to appear before the Palestinian legislative council to call for a year-long cease-fire.

The proposal, raised by a former Arab Knesset member and an Israeli businessman, suggested that President Moshe Katsav call for a yearlong hudna, the Arabic term for a temporary armistice.

Katsav, a former legislator from Sharon's Likud Party, indicated he was open to the idea.

But sources in Sharon's office shot the idea down as "stupid" and a Palestinian propaganda ploy.

On Tuesday, Sharon reiterated the need for "seven days of complete quiet" before moving ahead with peace plans.

"The seven days is not our idea, but it is up to both sides to come up with a program that they can agree to that gets us into Tenet and Mitchell," a State Department spokesman said.

The Bush administration prefers a different measure, hoping to see whether the Palestinian leader is making 100 percent effort against terror, even if he can't deliver 100 percent results.

Arafat has not met even that lower standard, U.S. officials say.

If the United States determines that the Palestinian Authority is doing enough to move forward with peace talks, the onus will fall on Sharon.

He will have to decide whether to accept the U.S. standard — or risk being seen as the obstacle to peace.

Already, Sharon is facing pressure from Katsav and Peres to open a dialogue with the Palestinians.

"The dovish members of this government don't have the ability to force anything on the government," Cohen said.

"But they have the capacity to make the United States' message to the Israeli people carry more weight."

While Palestinian terrorist groups have been relatively quiet in recent weeks — Arafat seems to have convinced them that a temporary cessation of attacks serves Palestinian national interests — Zinni's presence may once again be a catalyst.

In the eyes of some State Department officials, Zinni received the full treatment during his first visit to the region — ranting from the Palestinian leader, trilateral sessions that went nowhere and violence.

Now that he has been inaugurated into the fraternity of Middle East envoys, State Department officials hope this trip will be more successful. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

El Al avoids cemetery

El Al agreed to fly around a Jewish cemetery on Israel-New York flights.

Israeli Transportation Minister Ephraim Sneh sent a letter this week to leading rabbis and fervently Orthodox politicians promising that the Israeli planes would avoid the cemetery.

The airline admitted its pilots may have been flying over a cemetery in Holon, near Tel Aviv.

Jews who are Kohanim, or descendants of biblical priests, are forbidden to enter a cemetery, and some believe that flying over a cemetery violates that prohibition.

One rabbi had ruled that the prohibition could be avoided if a Kohen wrapped himself in a plastic body bag used for corpses.

But El Al refused to allow the bags on board for safety reasons.

Hillel opens new branch

Hillel announced it is opening a new Israel Affairs Department.

In collaboration with the Jewish Agency for Israel, Hillel has established a special department to provide Israel programming and respond to anti-Israel activity on North American college campuses.

Hillel had been planning the partnership for the past nine years.

But a rise in anti-Israel propaganda since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000 gave the program new impetus.

Lauder called 'fanatic Zionist'

Hezbollah called Jewish businessman Ronald Lauder a "fanatic Zionist."

The criticism came after Lebanon allowed the Jewish leader's company, Estee Lauder, to open an office in Beirut, according to the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Achronot*.

Lauder, the head of the Jewish National Fund, recently stepped down as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

JTA correspondent dies

Arno Herzberg, who headed JTA's Berlin bureau on the eve of World II, died Saturday in New Jersey at 94.

Herzberg, who served in the Berlin post from 1934 to 1937, saw his journalism work during the early years of the Nazi regime as "espionage," according to his son Peter.

In 1938, Herzberg emigrated to the United States, where he became an accountant and an expert on capital gains taxes.

Herzberg also continued to write for Jewish newspapers.

Firing of ADL's man in L.A. shocks local Jewish leaders

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Jewish community leaders here are reacting with surprise and dismay to the firing by the national Anti-Defamation League of its top regional representative here.

David Lehrer said he was "shocked and stunned" by his dismissal, coming after 27 years of service as director of ADL's Pacific Southwest Region.

The firing of one of the most enduring and popular Jewish professionals in the Los Angeles area highlights tensions between national headquarters in New York and independent-minded branches on the West Coast, frictions which have afflicted other national Jewish organizations, sources said.

The importance of what would ordinarily be an intra-organizational personnel action was shown by a lengthy article in Tuesday's Los Angeles Times. The article quoted angry reactions by Jewish leaders, as well as by Muslim spokesmen with whom Lehrer sought to establish working relationships. The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles, which first reported the story in its Dec. 28 issue, was devoting its next cover story on Jan. 4 to the case, under the banner "You're Fired."

In New York, ADL officials would not comment directly, but national spokeswoman Myrna Shinbaum released a statement, saying that "the Anti-Defamation League is always reviewing its operations, including that of its regional offices.

"Recognizing the importance and the needs of the Los Angeles community and ADL's commitment to the community, we are undertaking steps to strengthen our leadership and development efforts. To this end ADL's longtime director, David Lehrer, will be leaving the league."

Lehrer, 53, said he was summoned to New York on Dec. 21 and told of the dismissal by Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director.

According to Lehrer, Foxman said that he didn't like the quality of the lay leadership in Los Angeles, and, as the statement indicated, the regional development and fund-raising efforts. However, the Jewish Journal reported that under Lehrer's leadership, the local ADL's annual budget has grown from \$2 million to \$6 million and that in 2001 fund raising was up 30 percent over 2000.

Some 30 members of the regional president's council met Wednesday to consider the situation. They were also slated to meet Thursday with a delegation of national ADL staff members flying to Los Angeles, said Cecelia Katz, president of the Pacific Southwest Region.

Foxman remained in New York but was joining the discussions via telephone.

Katz did not rule out the possibility that an appeal would be made to reinstate Lehrer, if Lehrer so wished.

In a written statement, Katz called Lehrer "synonymous with Mr. ADL in Los Angeles and California" and said, "We deeply regret that David is leaving the directorship of the regional ADL." She said a search for his replacement would be conducted by the regional office in conjunction with the national ADL.

Typical of the reaction outside the local ADL was a statement by Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, the area's top Jewish politician, who called for a review of the national ADL decision.

"I am blown away," Yaroslavsky told the Los Angeles Times. "David Lehrer's outstanding reputation and his summary dismissal without warning do not compute. A lot of us are resentful because this decision was made by someone in New York without apparent consultation with the lay board of directors locally."

Local Muslim leaders, with whom Lehrer helped to draw up a code of ethics to avoid mutual stereotyping, also expressed their regrets.

"Probably he is paying the price for the more balanced view he took toward Muslims," Aslam Abdullah, vice president of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, told the Times.

The firing of Lehrer plays into the widespread local conviction that the top professionals who run national Jewish organizations from New York are unwilling to grant meaningful decision-making latitude to their regional outpost in America's second-largest Jewish community, even when dealing with purely local issues. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Even without Healy, Red Cross says it's committed to Israeli group***By Rachel Pomerance*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two months after Dr. Bernadine Healy resigned as head of the American Red Cross, the organization says it remains committed to supporting its Israeli counterpart, Magen David Adom.

Healy was a vocal supporter of Magen David's request to join the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The Israeli group has been blocked by Arab and Muslim states who argue that the international body can't recognize the red Star of David, Magen David's symbol.

Under Healy's guidance, the American group began withholding its dues to the international federation, which coordinates Red Cross societies in member countries, because of the Israeli issue.

Healy allegedly resigned because her position on the issue was at odds with that of the Red Cross. But the organization claims that's not the case.

In a Dec. 18 letter published in *The Washington Post*, the chairman of the Red Cross, David McLaughlin, wrote that "it is time to set the record straight," referring to two *Post* pieces that insinuated the nonprofit was backing away from Magen David.

McLaughlin noted that Healy was a "strong advocate" for including Magen David in the international federation, and that some members of the Red Cross board wanted to resume paying federation dues.

Yet McLaughlin argued that those differences were not related to Healy's departure.

On Oct. 27, the day after Healy's departure, the Red Cross' full board of governors voted to continue withholding dues and passed a resolution reaffirming its support of Magen David.

Almost two weeks later, McLaughlin addressed the leadership of the Red Cross and Crescent Societies in Geneva.

In a speech on the Sept. 11 terror attacks, he reiterated the American Red Cross' intent to withhold dues from the international federation.

Avi Zohar, director general of Magen David, said the circumstances surrounding Healy's departure were not related to the Magen David issue but had more to do with internal personality clashes.

The 70-year-old Israeli relief organization has been restricted to "observer" status within the international federation. The American Red Cross says it has lobbied behind the scenes for Magen David's inclusion over the past 25 years.

However, only in the last two years — under Healy — did it become the group's top international policy issue.

"I think the new administration will continue on the same track," Zohar said, though he conceded Healy "put the issue on a track it never was before."

Healy was "magnificent" on the issue, he said.

A 10-page cover story on Healy's demise in the Dec. 23 *New York Times Magazine* described her as giving "teeth" to what had been "quiet opposition" to Magen David's exclusion.

According to the article, two months after taking the helm in September 1999, Healy gave a forceful address to the international body in Geneva.

"She comes in and makes a speech in which she harangues the assembled membership about the inequity of the exclusion of MDA and how the American Red Cross is going to make inclusion happen now, whether we liked it or not," an executive of the international federation was quoted as saying in the *Times*.

Under Healy, the American Red Cross stopped paying its membership dues to the federation. The American group's dues account for 25 percent of the headquarters budget of the international group.

The third year of nonpayment is just beginning. After three years, the Red Cross will enter "default" status, which could lead its own membership in the international body to be revoked.

Still, according to Brian Majeuski, senior director of international policy and relations at the American Red Cross, "None of that amounts to enough for us to reverse course."

Majeuski maintained that the American group will continue to withhold dues until Magen David is given full voting rights.

Majeuski noted, too, that the more than 1,100 Red Cross chapters across the United States stand behind the decision.

"We lose our ability to mobilize people based on the moral, humanitarian ideals of the organization" if they don't stand up for the ideals, he said.

"We would rather go sit on the back of the bus with MDA than continue marching happily forward while MDA is excluded," Majeuski said.

The Red Cross stance has made a big difference, Zohar said. Apart from increased public awareness of the issue, Magen David has received friendly visits by supervisors of Red Cross societies who previously ignored the institution.

Though Magen David's international exclusion may give fodder to Israel's enemies, the "main issue" for the Israeli group, he said, is the "recognition given by the American Red Cross for its existence. This is more important for us than to be a full member in the international movement."

In any case, the American and Israeli organizations are working more closely than ever to address new terrorist threats.

Magen David officials lecture at the American Red Cross' new Clara Barton Center for Preparedness in Arkansas to help Americans respond to biological and chemical disasters.

Other recent programs include a training program the American group is offering Magen David to teach international humanitarian law courses to Israelis.

The American group also is equipping Magen David with a tracing system to help Holocaust survivors and immigrants in Israel find loved ones they haven't seen since World War II.

Zohar met with Red Cross officials in New York and Washington last week to determine how to expand the groups' collaboration.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, praised the American Red Cross' vigilance and support for Magen David in a Dec. 18 letter to *The New Yorker* magazine.

Foxman was refuting a statement in *The New Yorker* that said the Red Cross paid no attention to the Magen David issue before Healy took over.

"We don't know exactly why Dr. Healy was forced to resign and would tread very carefully before citing anti-Semitism as the reason," Foxman said in his letter. "We do know that the American Red Cross has been a consistent champion for recognition of Magen David Adom by the international community, and continues to be so today." □