



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 7

Thursday, January 10, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Ill wind long has blown from Iran in the direction of the Jewish state

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Iran has again surfaced on Israeli radar screens as a strategic threat to the Jewish state.

Israeli officials charged that 50 tons of weapons captured aboard a ship in the Red Sea last week were destined for the Palestinian Authority. The officials also made clear where they thought the shipment originated — the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“There is a partnership of interests between Iran and the Palestinian Authority,” Transportation Minister Ephraim Sneh, who has warned for years of the Iranian threat, told JTA. The Palestinian Authority “prepares itself for a military confrontation, and Iran provides the tools that could destroy Israel.”

As Sneh and other Israeli officials see it, Iran wants to repeat its successful experience with Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah used Iranian-supplied arms to threaten Israeli population centers in the north, Sneh says, ultimately forcing Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon after 18 years of occupation.

So, too, the arms shipment on board the seized ship, the Karine-A, was designed to threaten areas in the heart of Israel, he says.

The Iranians have denied any connection with the Karine-A. They quoted Lloyd’s List — a British publication that gives details of vessel movements and other information dealing with the merchant shipping community — that the vessel was owned by an Iraqi named Ali Mohammed Abbas. The Iranians also cited documents indicating that Abbas had bought the vessel from a Lebanese shipping company last August.

Lebanon, however, said Lloyd’s had confused the Karine-A with a similarly named ship that still flies the Lebanese flag.

“Iran’s denials are not surprising,” said Iranian affairs expert Menashe Amir, head of Persian-language broadcasts on Israel Radio. “Iran always denies its armed support of terrorist organizations, but confirms its ideological support.”

For years, Iran supplied arms to Hezbollah and trained its fighters on Iranian soil to be guerrillas and terrorists.

Over the years, Iran also has provided ample financial support to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

At one point the Palestinian Authority, which sometimes appears to consider the two terror groups as threats to its control, complained that Iran had given Hamas \$1 million to carry out armed attacks against Israel.

With Iran’s encouragement and support, Hamas’ military wing, Izz a-Din al-Kassam, has commenced joint operations with Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad.

Moreover, some Israeli security experts, among them Maj. Gen. Alik Ron, former chief of police in Israel’s northern region, have expressed concern that Iran has reached out to Israeli Arabs, using Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah operatives as intermediaries.

Prior to the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000, Iran was openly critical of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, branding him a traitor for pursuing the peace process with Israel.

After the intifada began, Iran “rehabilitated” Arafat. He subsequently met with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who encouraged him to continue with the armed struggle against Israel. Last April, representatives of the Palestinian Authority were

Hamas kills 4 Israeli soldiers

Four Israeli soldiers were killed in a Hamas attack in Israel.

Two Hamas members, wearing Palestinian police uniforms, cut through a security fence between the southern Gaza Strip and Israel early Wednesday morning and opened fire with automatic weapons and grenades on an Israeli military outpost.

In the attack and ensuing gunfight, a company commander and three soldiers were killed.

The two terrorists, one of whom belonged to the Palestinian naval forces, were killed. [Page 3]

Powell to Arafat: Explain ship

Colin Powell told Yasser Arafat that the United States wants a full explanation about an arms cache Israel seized last week in the Red Sea.

The U.S. secretary of state, speaking on the phone with the Palestinian Authority president, said he found the reports that Palestinians were involved with the weapons ship “deeply troubling,” according to a State Department spokesman. [Page 3]

Seminary nominates president

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College is expected to select a president Sunday.

Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, the immediate past president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and the spiritual leader of B’nai Keshet in Montclair, N.J., has been nominated to lead the Reconstructionist movement’s seminary, pending board approval.

If approved, Ehrenkrantz would replace Rabbi David Teutsch, who has been the institution’s president since 1993 and will step down this summer.

New UJA campaign chair

A former president of the Atlanta Jewish Federation was named national chairman of the 2003 UJA Federation campaign.

Stephen Selig, president of a real estate company in Atlanta, will succeed current 2002 campaign chair Robert Schroyer.

Selig served three terms as campaign chairman of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta before serving as federation president there. He currently is chairman of the Human Services and Social Policy Pillar of the United Jewish Communities.

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel halts mosque construction

Israel decided to halt construction of a mosque next to a major Christian shrine in Nazareth. The mosque would stand next to the Basilica of the Annunciation, built where tradition says the Angel Gabriel foretold the birth of Jesus.

The project has caused friction between Christians and Muslims, and the Israeli government has found itself caught in the middle.

Israeli legislator won't apologize

An Israeli legislator refused to apologize for calling the U.S. ambassador to Israel a "Jew boy." Knesset member Zvi Hendel told Israel's Army Radio on Wednesday that while his choice of words may have been extreme, he had no intention of apologizing to U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer. Hendel on Tuesday called Kurtzer a "Jew boy" and accused him of meddling in internal Israeli affairs.

Hendel was responding to Kurtzer's recent remark that Israel should spend money on the disabled, not on Jewish settlements.

During a special session Wednesday, the Knesset Ethics Committee ruled that Hendel must send Kurtzer a letter of apology. And in another development, Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg invited Kurtzer to attend a special meeting next Monday to receive an apology from the Knesset.

Palestinians clash in Gaza

Several Palestinians were wounded in a gun battle between Palestinian security forces and Hamas members. The firefight erupted Wednesday when Palestinian Authority forces arrested a Hamas member in the Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Several armed Hamas members took cover in a building used by the U.N. relief agency and began firing on the Palestinian police, Israel's Army Radio reported.

invited to a conference in Tehran of the so-called Palestinian rejectionist movements, which oppose the entire peace process with Israel.

At the conference, Iranian officials said the anti-Israeli front should intensify its activities to take advantage of Israel's "state of instability and weakness."

Iran's supreme ruler, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called in a recent speech for the destruction of Israel, which he described "as a malignant tumor that must be pulled out of the Islamic soil." And — as if more needed to be said about Iran's intentions — Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president of Iran who still holds an influential position in the country, spoke last month of the need to annihilate Israel with nuclear weapons.

After Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres complained to the United Nations, Iran issued a statement saying Rafsanjani had been misinterpreted.

True, an internal debate in Iran over the need for greater democratization has also affected some attitudes toward Israel. Lately, some have argued that Iran does not need to be more extreme than the Palestinians themselves, who ostensibly are willing to make peace with Israel.

Mohammad Reza Tajik, an advisor to Khatami and head of the Strategic Studies Institute of Iran, spoke at a recent symposium of the damage caused to Iran's international status by its unqualified support for the Palestinians.

And Ayatollah Shakuri, a member of the Iranian Parliament, went so far as to advise the government to accept Israel's existence and let the Palestinians determine their own fate. Despite such comments, the prevailing wind from Iran has been ill indeed toward Israel.

Israeli officials for years have warned of the dangers posed by the transfer of nuclear technology to Iran from Russia. Both Russia and Iran claim the technology is for peaceful purposes only.

Some Israeli officials wonder whether the United States has focused too much on Iraq and has been blind to the threat posed by Iran. But, according to Maj. Gen. Amos Malka, the outgoing chief of army intelligence, this is not the case.

The recent rapprochement between Washington and Tehran is misleading, he said, because it is "a temporary meeting of interests due to the war in Afghanistan."

According to Malka, the Bush administration is well aware of the fact that Iran is a "very dangerous" country — not only because of its support of terrorists, but because of its efforts to obtain a nuclear potential. □

Pentagon finds another \$28 million to help Israel fight against terrorism

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States will give Israel an additional \$28 million this year to fight terrorism.

A State Department spokesman said the funds were found in the Defense Department's budget, earmarked for foreign counter-terrorism efforts. The money will be used for robotics and X-ray machines to scan trucks and cargo containers.

Israel must purchase the items from U.S. manufacturers, the State Department spokesman said.

Israel's public security minister, Uzi Landau, told American officials in July that more funds were needed to replenish the supply of robots that dismantle bombs in Israel. The robots often are damaged while dissecting bombs and cannot be reused.

Israel already has spent the \$100 million in counterterrorism aid it receives from the United States each year under the 1998 Wye Agreement. The new money is part of the supplemental funds designated for counterterrorism after the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

This money is separate from the annual foreign operations appropriations package that passed Congress last month. That earmarked \$2.7 billion in economic and military aid for Israel.

It also is separate from the \$800 million supplemental aid package Israel still is requesting from the United States.

That money, originally requested by President Clinton and Israel from the last Congress, was to help Israel with the military costs associated with its withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000. □



Daily News Bulletin

Ivan Michael Schaeffer, *President*
 Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
 Lisa Hastein, *Editor*
 Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*
 Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*
 Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

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.
 © JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Attack on Tenn. shul prevented

An attack on a Nashville synagogue was thwarted.

Michael Edward Smith, 33, was arrested last Friday after someone notified police that he was sitting in his car with a rifle pointed at the Sherith Israel Congregation synagogue.

Police found guns, ammunition and surgical gloves in Smith's car.

They also uncovered five buried stockpiles of his hand grenades and bomb making material south of Nashville, along with more explosives and white supremacist literature in his home.

Among other counts, Smith was charged Monday with unlawful weapons possession and was being held without bond. Smith's family told detectives he has suffered from mental illness.

Faith-based program shot down

A U.S. court struck down government funding of a religion-based social service program.

A federal judge ruled Tuesday that "unrestricted, direct funding" of FaithWorks, a Christian-based program in Wisconsin that helps fathers with drug treatment and job training, violates the church-state provisions of the First Amendment.

The decision is the first federal court decision striking down aid from Washington to religious groups under the "charitable choice" provisions passed as part of the 1996 federal welfare reform law.

New ADL appointee in L.A.

The Anti-Defamation League named Aaron Levinson as interim director of its office in Los Angeles.

The post became vacant when David Lehrer, who had served as director for 27 years, was fired last month by Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director in New York. Lehrer's dismissal was met with shock and anger by Jewish leaders in Los Angeles.

Levinson has worked for the ADL since 1996.

Sarajevo Haggadah restored

Experts completed restoration work on the 600-year-old Sarajevo Haggadah.

Jakob Finci, the president of the Bosnian Jewish community, told JTA that repairs to one of the world's most famous Jewish manuscripts were completed a few days ago. Work will soon begin to prepare a special room to display it in Sarajevo's National Museum.

Nuremberg documents go online

Reports on the Nazis prepared for the Nuremberg Trials are expected to be available online Thursday.

The documents prepared by the U.S. government after World War II will be available at www.lawandreligion.com.

Lawmakers cancel Arafat meeting after Palestinians kill Israeli soldiers

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Palestinian attack that killed four Israeli soldiers has caused five members of the U.S. Congress to cancel a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

The lawmakers said Wednesday that the murder of four Israeli soldiers by Hamas at a military outpost, coming after Israel's Jan. 3 capture of 50 tons of weapons from a ship allegedly headed for the hands of the Palestinian Authority, led to the decision.

"In memory of the four Israeli soldiers that were killed this morning by Hamas terrorist gunmen, my congressional colleagues and I have refused to attend the scheduled meeting with Yasser Arafat," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.). "During the meeting, I had planned to tell Mr. Arafat that he was, is, and continues to be a terrorist, violator of human rights and a disgrace as a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize."

The other lawmakers were Reps. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), ranking minority member of the House International Relations Committee's Middle East panel; Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.); Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.); and Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

The lawmakers' decision came after a Palestinian attack on an Israeli army outpost Wednesday shattered a recent lull in violence and threatened a further escalation of the conflict. The four Israeli soldiers and two armed Palestinians were killed early Wednesday in a gun battle that broke out after the two Palestinians crossed the border fence and attacked an army outpost on the southern Gaza Strip border near Kibbutz Kerem Shalom.

The two men wore Palestinian police uniforms and were armed with rifles, hand grenades and explosives. Reports said they received back-up assistance from six others who remained on the Gaza side of the fence.

One of the troops killed was a company commander. Two Israeli soldiers were also wounded in the clash, one of them seriously.

All of the troops were members of a Bedouin unit.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. Hamas' political leader, Khaled Mashaal, said in remarks broadcast from Lebanon that the organization's military wing had carried out the attack. Hezbollah television named them as members of Hamas, and said one was also in the Palestinian naval police.

At a briefing for reporters, the head of the army's southern command, Maj.-Gen. Doron Almog, said there is coordination between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. He said Hamas planned to step up attacks following U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni's recent mission to the region to advance a cease-fire.

The Palestinian Authority denied any involvement in the attack and said an internal inquiry would be launched.

Regarding reports that one of the attackers was a member of the Palestinian naval force, the Palestinian Authority said no personnel were reported missing.

One senior Palestinian security official called the incident an attempt by opposition groups in the region to sabotage efforts to restore calm in the area and advance a cease-fire agreement. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened the Security Cabinet to discuss the attack.

Several of the U.S. legislators were in Israel to attend a meeting of Jewish lawmakers and ministers. It is unclear whether all five were scheduled to meet with Arafat, or just some of them.

"Yasser Arafat has made himself an international pariah through his own actions," Nadler said. "When Yasser Arafat gets serious about peace, I think he will find the world more receptive to him, but he must show that he is serious through actions, not just words."

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee applauded the lawmaker's decision, saying it sent a strong message to Arafat.

"Palestinian violence against Israelis, which has continued unabated for more than a year, has reached horrific proportions," AIPAC President Tim Wuliger said.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke by phone with Arafat on Wednesday and told him that the United States wants a full explanation about the weapons ship. □

Birthright visitors revel in chance to visit Jewish state, meet Israelis

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Wearing purple, turquoise and yellow Taglit scarves, some 1,500 Birthright Israel participants cheered their way through an event marking the first installment of this year's Birthright program.

"Taglit" is the Hebrew name for the program. The word could be seen emblazoned across the dozens of buses that transported 3,000 participants around Israel during the last 10 days.

The Birthright program offers a free, 10-day educational trip to Israel for any Jew aged 18 to 26 who hasn't gone to the Jewish state before on an organized tour.

There are 6,000 participants who will be visiting Israel during the winter 2002 trips, some 3,500 of them from North America.

The program initially had hoped to send more than 10,000 Jews this winter. But recruitment was difficult and cancellation rates high due to fears of terrorism.

Held Saturday night at Jerusalem's International Convention Center, the "Mega Event" is an opportunity for Birthright participants and the program's sponsors to see and acknowledge one another.

"Birthright is a huge success because you chose to come here," said Charles Bronfman, who founded Birthright Israel with fellow philanthropist Michael Steinhardt.

Some of the Canadian participants responded by lifting their red-and-white national flag above their heads, prompting a cheer from Bronfman.

"I am Canadian, I am Jewish and I love it," he said.

The packed program included speeches from dignitaries, including Israeli President Moshe Katsav.

When the president entered the crowded auditorium, the participants burst out singing "Am Yisrael Chai," clapping and waving the Israeli flags handed out at the entrance.

"You're fantastic, you're wonderful," said Katsav, who called upon the participants to cultivate their ties with Israel and consider building their homes in the Jewish state.

"I'm planning on living here," said Ariel Oziel, 20, of Toronto. "This has been the best trip ever, and it makes everything really hit home."

Along with master of ceremonies and comedian Joel Chasoff, the Mega Event featured drummers, two Israeli musical acts, acrobatics and a sound and light show.

The event also rolled out the red carpet for the program's founders and sponsors, including Bronfman; Steinhardt; Russian-Israeli entrepreneur Lev Levayev; controversial businessman Marc Rich, who was pardoned by President Clinton; and Shari Arison, chairman of Arison Holdings, which include Carnival Cruise Lines and a majority holding in Bank Hapoalim, Israel's largest bank.

"This was a really incredible spectacle," said Maya Hamou, 22, of Montreal. "I've never seen so many Jews in one room."

Some 55 percent of this year's participants are from North America, 26 percent from the former Soviet Union, 10 percent from Latin America and 6 percent from Europe.

Some of the 500 Argentinean students due to arrive are considering staying beyond their 10-day Birthright visit, given the current financial crisis in their country.

For the first time, groups from Paraguay, Hungary and Morocco are taking part. Participants said they enjoyed having

contact with Israelis during their trip. "It's the best way to really get to know what it's like here," said Jessica Bookman, 26, who was on a bus with 18 Canadians and 15 Israelis.

At the end of the Mega Event, the participants headed over to a disco set up in the building. Some of the more religious Birthrighters started an impromptu circle of Jewish dancing, preferring dancing to the chant "Mashiach" than to the trance beat being played downstairs.

In an effort to keep Birthright participants safe, the organization has restricted their free time, limiting their outings to downtown Jerusalem and local clubs. Instead, it's been discos in their hotels almost every night.

As a result, some of the participants said they'd had their fill of dancing. "I'm worn out with the discos," said Yoel Gordon, 21, of Toronto. "But this has been a great trip." □

With help from farmer's widow, case against camp guard upheld

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — Testimony from an Austrian farmer's widow has helped convince a U.S. court this week to uphold a decision revoking the citizenship of a former Nazi concentration camp guard.

Theodor Szebinskyj, who lost his citizenship two years ago after a U.S. district court determined he had served as a Nazi guard, has claimed that he spent all of World War II working on an Austrian farm.

During their investigation into the case, officials with the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations located Hildegard Lechner, the widow of the owner of the farm where Szebinskyj says he spent the war years.

Lechner, 88 at the time of her testimony, said Szebinskyj had worked on the farm, but left in the summer of 1942.

"The alibi that he never left the farm was destroyed by her remarkable testimony," said Eli Rosenbaum, director of OSI's criminal division.

The U.S. government has maintained that Szebinskyj, who was born in Poland, served as an armed camp guard between 1943 and 1945 at three Nazi concentration camps, including Sachsenhausen. Lechner's testimony on Szebinskyj's departure date from the farm allows for that possibility. The earlier court ruling had found that the government had proved its case with the help of documents found in Germany, Russia and Ukraine.

Faced with Lechner's testimony, Szebinskyj, 77, "subtly changed" his story, the appeals court said. His lawyer argued that the evidence was insufficient to convict Szebinskyj, and that even if he had been a concentration camp guard, it had not been proven that he was armed and participated in atrocities.

The judge for the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Maryanne Trump Barry, rejected his arguments.

The decision could have ramifications, an OSI official said.

"The Justice Department's continuing determination to track down those who participated in the Nazi regime's reign of terror should also serve as a warning to modern-day perpetrators of mass murders that they will be pursued as long as it takes to bring them to justice," said Michael Chertoff, the assistant attorney general for OSI's criminal division.

A retired machinist living in the Philadelphia area, Szebinskyj could face deportation. □