



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jerusalem shooting victims die

Two Israeli women, aged 79 and 56, died from wounds they sustained in Tuesday's Palestinian terror attack in Jerusalem. The older woman was identified as Sarah Hamburger, a resident of Jerusalem.

A mother of four, Hamburger was on her way to a lecture when she was hit by the terrorist's gunfire. Hamburger was a seventh-generation Israeli.

She grew up in Hebron, but fled the city with her family during the 1929 riots. An Israeli government spokesman said the Jerusalem attack would not go unpunished. She was buried Wednesday in Jerusalem.

Israeli killed by fellow soldier

An Israeli soldier was killed by friendly fire on Tuesday.

Sgt. Gil Ben-Melech, 19, from Jerusalem, died of his wounds after a fellow soldier accidentally discharged a machine gun during a patrol in the Ramallah area.

Muslim official spurs controversy

U.S. Jewish leaders are angry that a controversial Muslim has been asked to address the State Department later this month.

Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council, is scheduled to speak Jan. 28 on "Rising Voices of Moderate Muslims" as part of the State Department's annual Open Forum lecture series.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, Al-Marayati said Israel should be a suspect because the attacks diverted "attention from what's happening in the Palestinian territories." [Page 3]

Holocaust claims chair to remain

The chairman of a group focusing on Holocaust-era claims threatened to quit, but later decided to stay in his post.

Lawrence Eagleburger said talks Wednesday with insurance regulators, insurance firms and Jewish groups convinced him that he will be granted the authority necessary to complete the work of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

U.S. lawmakers and Holocaust survivors have criticized the commission for being too slow and not getting money to policyholders or their heirs.

NEWS ANALYSIS

U.S. policy-makers visit Syria: Important, or misguided outreach?

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) —A steady stream of U.S. lawmakers and officials has visited Syria in recent weeks, signaling a new U.S. openness toward Israel's northern neighbor.

While some see the new outreach as an important effort to connect with a potential ally in the U.S.-led war on terrorism, others see it as a misguided warming toward a country that harbors terrorists and refuses to compromise on peace with Israel.

"Syria has been a very small player in the last four months," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, a think tank, and author of "Syria Beyond the Peace Process."

"Syria is a potentially larger factor of what comes next. Are they our ally against Iraq or a problem themselves?"

The outreach to Syria comes as President Bashar Assad has formed his new government, 18 months after inheriting the reins from his father, Hafez.

It also comes as Syria has taken on a new role in international politics as the newest member of the U.N. Security Council.

Syria appears to be using its new status both as a way to garner American support for its struggling economy — and as a way to speak out against Israel.

Syria's deputy ambassador to the United Nations outraged Israeli, Jewish and American officials last week when he compared the sight of Palestinian homes destroyed by Israel in the Gaza Strip to the destruction of the World Trade Center bombing.

"We must note the scene of tens of Palestinian houses which were demolished by Israeli tanks in the Rafah camps a few days ago is not much different from the scene of the World Trade Center which was destroyed by the terrorists, whom we have all agreed here to combat and eliminate," Faisal Mekdad said last Friday.

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, in a speech to the council late Friday, said he regretted Syria's "baseless allegations." He called Mekdad's statement "a transparent attempt to divert attention from Syria's own record as a country that supports, encourages, finances and harbors a vast gamut of terrorist organizations."

Syria remains on the U.S. State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, but some see Syria as having a common interest in going after international terrorism.

Indeed, many of the lawmakers who visited the region sit on committees related to international terrorism.

The Syrians "are very sensitive to the idea of religiously based terrorism," said Richard Murphy, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria.

"They recognize an opportunity, which is rare, to have the same concerns as the United States," said Murphy, a senior fellow for the Middle East at the Council on Foreign Relations. Syria, which supports Hezbollah, sees a distinction between international terrorism and the "resistance movements," he said.

During the just-concluded congressional recess, Syria hosted four separate delegations of U.S. lawmakers, including House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, was scheduled to hold talks with Assad this week. These meetings show a new U.S. willingness to work with Assad while exploring Syria's potential role as ally in the war against terrorism.

"U.S. relations with Syria have been anomalous for close to 20 years in the sense

MIDEAST FOCUS

Jerusalem bombing averted

A bombing was averted in Jerusalem. A bomb was discovered Tuesday night hidden inside a bag near a banquet hall in Jerusalem's Talpiot neighborhood. A passer-by alerted police, who evacuated the hall and neutralized the device. Israeli security officials have warned of a new wave of terrorist attacks.

Palestinians seek revenge

Thousands of Palestinians marching in a funeral procession called on Hamas to launch attacks on Israel. The march took place Wednesday in the West Bank city of Nablus for three of four Hamas terrorists Israel killed during a raid the day before.

One of the dead was identified as Yousef Soragji, 42, leader of the Hamas military wing in the West Bank. Hamas has said it would unleash "all-out war" in retaliation for the deaths.

Israel, Hezbollah trade fire

Hezbollah gunmen fired at Israeli positions in a disputed area on the Israel-Lebanon border. After the gunmen fired mortars Wednesday at the Shabaa Farms area, Israel retaliated with cross-border shelling and an airstrike on suspected Hezbollah positions.

Tourism to Israel plummets

Tourism to Israel dropped 54 percent last year. Of the 1.2 million people who visited Israel despite the ongoing violence last year, the largest group of visitors were Americans, followed by the British.

Grandpa Barak

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak can now add "grandfather" to his resume.

His eldest daughter, Michal, gave birth to a boy in New York, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported. Barak and his wife, Nava, were on hand to greet the newborn.

that it is viewed as a rogue state, but unlike other rogue states, it has always been seen as a redeemable one," Pipes said.

Murphy said the country is still a mystery for many American officials.

"Among all the countries in the former peace process, Syria is the least known, but recognized as a potential player," Murphy said.

He said it is important for lawmakers to get to know the country, especially if its leadership shows a willingness to aid the coalition against terrorism.

A State Department official said the Al Qaida network blamed for the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington is also a threat to Syria.

In addition to pledging its support for the war on terrorism, the Syrian government has been moderating the state-controlled press and restraining Hezbollah in its attacks against the Shabaa Farms region of the Lebanon-Israel border. The area was declared part of Israel in the wake of the withdrawal from Lebanon, though Arab states dispute that claim. All of these actions are seen as attempts to improve Syria's image in the U.S. mind-set, so as to garner support for its struggling economy and to be removed from the State Department's list, which brings with it economic sanctions.

State Department officials say the country has much to do to improve relations with the United States, but that Syria's expression of support for the coalition against terrorism "plants a seed" to help move the process forward.

This sentiment troubles some U.S. Jewish officials, who fear the lawmakers are not taking the country to task for harboring terrorism and for using its United Nations seat to launch verbal attacks against Israel.

"Because Syria continues to sponsor terrorism and support and harbor terrorist groups, they have clearly decided what side of America's war they're on," said an official with an American Jewish organization who asked not to be identified.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Syria is reaching out to American lawmakers to change its image from a terrorist state.

"They got the message that the president is serious, that he means what he says about terrorism, wherever it is, and Assad knows that he is a serious base for terrorist organizations with international reach," Foxman said. "We are responding, which I think is fine, as long as we keep our eye on the ball."

Foxman said Assad still needs to dismantle the terrorist groups that are headquartered in Damascus, as well as not allow his country to be a transfer point between Iran and Hezbollah for arms and equipment.

Also, he said Syria should pressure the Lebanese Army to fulfill its obligation to pull out from the Israel-Lebanon border, and for Syria to recognize and leave Lebanon.

But, Jewish supporters of such visits argue, visiting a country is not an inherent sign of support for the government or its policies.

M.J. Rosenberg, policy director of the Israel Policy Forum, said the congressional delegations could play positive roles in the Middle East.

"It's not a question of whether you go to these countries, it's a question of what you say to them," Rosenberg said. "It's helpful if they encourage peace and cooperation in the region."

The big concern is whether the lawmakers will be taken in by the spin.

"The question is what lessons they take back from it," said James Lindsay, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "It may be very different from what their hosts want them to take."

There were concerns that one congressional contingent had expressed support for Syria's work in combating regional terrorism, while not pressing for additional curtailing of activities. But Durbin has denied quotes attributed to him saying the world could learn from Syria's own dealings with domestic terrorism.

Speaking to reporters last week, Durbin called it "predictable" that Assad accused the Israelis of terrorism.

"He didn't want to acknowledge his sponsorship of terrorism around the Middle East, and that came as no surprise," Durbin said.

Wayne Owens, a former Utah congressman who now serves as president of the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation, organized Durbin's trip.

He said despite the State Department's designation of Syria as a terrorist state, he has been taking trips to the region for years.

"Visitors don't constitute recognition," Owens said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Jews question State's invitation to a controversial Arab American

By Matthew E. Berger

Iran bribe over AMIA bombing?

Results of an investigation into a possible cover-up of the 1994 bombing of an Argentine Jewish community center should be made public, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is urging.

Following a request from Argentina, Swiss officials are investigating whether former Argentine President Carlos Menem took a \$10 million bribe from Iran to cover up the 1994 AMIA bombing, which killed 85 people and wounded 300.

Neo-Nazis protected by loophole

An attempt by the German government to ban a far-right party hit a legal snag.

Last year, in a move supported by both houses of Parliament, the government asked the country's highest court to consider banning the National Democratic Party, which recruits its members from skinhead groups around Germany.

But on Tuesday, the Federal Constitutional Court said it was postponing a hearing set for Feb. 5 because it had learned that one of the most vocal members of the party had worked as an informant for Germany's domestic intelligence agency.

The court said it would have to check the legal implications of hearing a case based on statements made by an informant.

Jews to visit alleged JDL target

Leaders of a California synagogue will pay a friendly visit to the mosque Jewish radicals allegedly planned to bomb.

Valley Beth Shalom, one of the Los Angeles area's largest Conservative synagogues, has accepted an invitation to send a busload of members to the King Fahad Mosque for services on Feb. 22.

The mosque drew national headlines when two members of the militant Jewish Defense League were arrested and then indicted on charges of conspiring to destroy it and the office of an Arab American congressman.

The two have denied the charges. "Judaism has to reach out in spite of all the animosity," Valley Beth Shalom's Rabbi Harold Schulweis told JTA. "If not, we will surrender all our life to the generals, admirals and militaries of the world."

Stolen Chagall appears safe

A Chagall painting whose theft was linked to the Middle East crisis is apparently safe. A postal worker in Kansas recently found what is believed to be "Study Over Vitebsk" in a pile of mail deemed undeliverable.

The painting was stolen from New York's Jewish Museum in June.

A ransom note said it would not be returned until there was peace in the Middle East.

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some American Jewish leaders are angry that a controversial Muslim leader has been asked to address the State Department next week.

Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council, is scheduled to address State Department staffers Jan. 28 to speak on "Rising Voices of Moderate Muslims," as part of the department's annual Open Forum lecture series.

Al-Marayati has been criticized by Jewish leaders for comments he has made about the State of Israel, most recently claiming Israel should be a suspect in the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America, has written to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Richard Haass, U.S. director of policy planning, asking that Al-Marayati's invitation be revoked.

The lecture series "is no place for any extremist who praises terrorists and calls for the destruction of America's ally," he said, referring to Israel.

"Allowing Salam Al-Marayati to speak at the State Department will give him a podium and legitimacy that he does not deserve," Klein wrote in the letter.

Al-Marayati's comments on a Los Angeles radio show in the hours after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks outraged Jewish leaders and others.

"If we're going to look at suspects, we should look to the groups that benefit the most from these kinds of incidents, and I think we should put the State of Israel on the suspect list because I think this diverts attention from what's happening in the Palestinian territories so that they can go on with their aggression and occupation and apartheid policies," he said.

He later told the Los Angeles Times that the quotation was correct but taken out of context, and that he sent a "clarification" to Jewish leaders.

He has also justified suicide bombings in Israel, reportedly saying a bombing in a Jerusalem pizzeria last year was the "expected bitter result of the reckless policy" of the Israeli government. He has commonly called actions considered by Americans and Israelis as terrorist actions "legitimate resistance."

"He represents the very thing we are fighting against," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said this week.

"He has constantly been attacking Israel, and even those who have defended him earlier have changed their thinking."

For his part, Al-Marayati said he believed the Jewish response was just "diversionary tactics to keep attention away from the modern Muslim voice."

"I think they need to listen to what I have to say before making a judgment," he told JTA. "That's the whole purpose of an open forum. You let people who you don't normally listen to have a say and try to develop a better understanding."

Al-Marayati has long been controversial in the Jewish world.

He was appointed by House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) in 1999 to the National Commission on Terrorism, but the lawmaker withdrew the appointment a month later, after Jewish groups accused Al-Marayati of condoning terrorism and making statements critical of Israel.

When the issue was raised at the State Department briefing on Wednesday, spokesman Richard Boucher said Al-Marayati was not invited by the secretary, but by the Forum's coordinators.

"Their goal, with a mandate from the secretary, is to encourage a variety of discussion," Boucher said. "As far as I know, there's no policy approval of who speaks and who doesn't."

The State Department's Open Forum is an annual set of lectures that "explores important questions related to U.S. national interests and honors leaders" in various fields for outstanding contributions to international affairs, according to the State Department Web site.

On Wednesday, Klein was invited to speak at the Forum as well. He said that while that didn't address his concerns about Al-Marayati, he has accepted the invitation. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Jewish interfaith leaders praise new Church document on Messiah**

By Ruth E. Gruber

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Jews involved in interfaith dialogue are praising a new Vatican document that appears to represent a turning point in the way Roman Catholic doctrine views the Hebrew Bible.

One of the key points of “The Jewish People and the Holy Scriptures in the Christian Bible” is that the Church believes the “Old Testament” retains its moral value, not just its literary appeal, Rabbi Arthur Schneier told JTA by telephone from New York.

Schneier is the president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, a group that promotes religious freedom.

Released quietly two months ago, the document also explicitly states that “the Jewish wait for the Messiah is not in vain.”

Jews and Christians share the wait for the Messiah, it says, but Jews are waiting for the first coming, and Christians for the second.

“The difference consists in the fact that for us, he who will come will have the same traits of that Jesus who has already come,” wrote the Vatican’s chief theologian, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who signed the document.

The document also expresses regret that certain passages in the Christian Bible condemning individual Jews have been used to justify anti-Semitism. Nowhere in the Christian Bible, it said, can one find passages reflecting “an attitude of scorn, hostility or persecution of Jews as Jews.”

Jews involved in interfaith dialogue welcomed the document.

“It seems to be another significant, positive step in the process of increasing Catholic appreciation of Jews and Judaism,” said Stanislaw Krajewski, the Warsaw consultant of the American Jewish Committee and a longtime activist in Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

The fact that Ratzinger, who is regarded as a conservative, signed the document also is seen as significant. A document he released last year called “*Dominus Iesus*” appeared to challenge the idea that “one religion is as good as another.”

Vatican chief spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls said the new document now is part of official church doctrine.

The Catholic News Agency wrote, “Commission members said their document was meant to contribute to Jewish-Christian understanding by explaining the importance of the Jewish Scriptures for Christian faith and providing a context for Christians reading references to Jews in the New Testament.”

The document has been making news not just for its message, but because it was published with almost no fanfare.

The document appeared in some Rome bookstores two months ago as a 210-page volume. But it was released in French and Italian only, and was not publicized.

The Vatican usually announces major documents and presents them officially at press conferences. A Polish translation was released last week to coincide with the “Day of Judaism” marked annually by the Roman Catholic church in Poland on Jan. 17, but no full English text has yet been released.

Krajewski said the Polish translation of the document was carried out by the Rev. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, a professor in Lublin, who also was a member of the commission that researched and wrote it.

He noted that Rubinkiewicz’s views on Jews and Judaism were influenced by a trip he made to the United States several years ago

within the framework of an American Jewish Committee program aimed at teaching Catholic priests about Judaism.

“I am sure that the influence of that trip was very positive,” Krajewski said. “He told me how impressed he was.”

Other Jewish commentators also praised the Vatican document, but some called it less of a breakthrough.

The document is a positive statement, but not a marked departure from Church views in recent years, according to Rabbi Charles Arian, the Jewish staff scholar at the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies.

The legitimacy of the Jewish religion has been implicit in church doctrine, but this document makes it more explicit, Arian said. It is unclear whether the document tries to reconcile Judaism’s validity with a contradictory doctrine that claims Jesus’ resurrection is of “universal significance.”

But the document does come close to a full rejection of the concept that Christianity replaced Judaism, said Eugene Korn, director of Interfaith Affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

Since the document determines that Jewish scriptures are sacred and there is validity to Jews’ wait for the Messiah, it implies that the covenant between God and the Jews is valid. That would overturn the traditional Catholic understanding of Judaism, Korn said. □

(JTA correspondent Sharon Samber in Washington contributed to this report.)

Making up for past, churches give money to British Zionists

By Tamar Shiloh

LONDON (JTA) — Churches in the city of Derby have presented the Zionist Federation with \$4,300 after renouncing a 700-year-old charter that barred “any Jew or Jewess from ever living” in the city.

Rev. Geoff Pickup of the New Life Christian Center in Derby, in central England, wrote to the Zionist Federation, the central Zionist organization in Great Britain, explaining the decision.

“Seven hundred years ago the burgesses of Derby paid the king 10 marks,” equivalent to almost \$4,300 today, “for a charter to exclude any Jew or Jewess from ever living or being remembered in Derby,” Pickup wrote.

“We feel we have now cut off the injustice of 700 years with much prayer and repentance,” the letter said. “We now feel as a token of our respect and to bring a closure motion on the past that we would like to give the equivalent amount of money to a Jewish cause. I hope you will accept this gift with our love, apologies, honours and prayers.”

“We are stunned and delighted at this fantastic gesture, and the donation will be put to good use, going to one of our charities in Israel,” said Alan Aziz, executive director of the Zionist Federation.

“It underlines all the efforts we have made over the past few years to better the relationship between Jews and non-Jews.”

Last March, a service officially renouncing the charter was held in Derby Cathedral.

An appeal was made during the service, attended by more than 150 church members from the Derby area, to raise the money.

“It took 700 years to undo the charter, and then it took another seven months to raise” the money, said Geoffrey Smith, of the Christian Friends of Israel. □