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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Two killed in Beersheba attack

Two female Israeli soldiers were killed and at least five other people seriously wounded in a Palestinian shooting attack Sunday in Beersheba.

Two gunmen in a car opened fire at a cafe located a block from the army's southern command headquarters. The two assailants were shot dead by security forces.

The two soldiers were identified as 1st Lt. Keren Rothstein, 20, from Ashkelon, and Cpl. Aya Malachi, 18, from Moshav Ein Habsor.

The attack, for which Hamas claimed responsibility, occurred around lunchtime, close to a snack bar frequented by soldiers who serve at the base.

Later Sunday, Israeli jets fired missiles at Palestinian security targets in Gaza City to retaliate for the attack.

Woman killed in attack

An Israeli woman was killed and her son lightly wounded in a West Bank shooting attack. Atala Lipovsky, 79, was killed when Palestinians opened fire on their vehicle near Ariel on Saturday night. The gunmen fled to Palestinian-controlled areas.

Jerusalem site of stabbing death

A group of Arab teen-agers stabbed an Israeli woman to death near a popular tourist promenade in Jerusalem.

Moran Amit, a 25-year-old university student, was walking with a man last Friday near the Haas Promenade when the couple was attacked by a gang of Arab youths who stabbed the woman.

The four assailants were apprehended following a police pursuit in which the police opened fire.

One of the teens died during his arrest, and police initially said the cause was heart failure. But doctors performing an autopsy found a bullet.

Rocket fired into Israel from Gaza

Palestinians fired a rocket Sunday into Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Israeli army officials said the Kassam rocket, built by Hamas, was a type not previously used in the more than 16 months of violence. The rocket exploded between two tractors in a kibbutz and caused no injuries, but Israeli officials said they regarded the Palestinians' use of the weapon as a serious escalation.

Bush blasts Arafat over terrorism; Sharon seeks alternative leaders

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For weeks, observers were waiting for Ariel Sharon to ask President Bush to cut ties with Yasser Arafat.

In the end, Israel's prime minister didn't ask the United States to cut off the Palestinian Authority president, but rather to begin cultivating new leadership within the Palestinian ranks.

"We believe that pressure should be put on Arafat," Sharon said Feb. 7 in the Oval Office, following an hourlong meeting with Bush. "I hope to have an alternative leadership in the future."

The call to consider alternatives to Arafat is a "nuanced message," according to Israeli officials, and something the Bush administration might find diplomatically more feasible than cutting Arafat off completely.

For the last several weeks, highlighted by a visit from Jordan's King Abdullah, the White House has made it clear that it still sees Arafat as relevant, and powerful enough to take the necessary steps to control Palestinian violence.

Having been advised that the Bush administration would rebuke a request to cut ties to Arafat, Sharon decided to shift gears.

"Israel's policy is that they are not going to take active steps to destroy Arafat or the Palestinian Authority, but would be happy to see it go," said Tamara Wittes, an analyst with the Middle East Institute. "Coming in and talking about this idea with Bush is a gentler way of moving this process along."

The Israeli Cabinet declared Arafat "irrelevant" after a wave of terror attacks in December.

A week before coming to Washington, Sharon made a gesture toward seeking an alternative Palestinian leadership by meeting with three other Palestinian officials.

That allowed Sharon to appease the Israeli left wing by negotiating with senior Palestinians, yet satisfies right wingers by keeping his distance from Arafat.

The White House comments came on the same day that Arafat mentioned two of the three officials Sharon met with — the speaker of the Palestinian legislative council, Ahmed Karia, and Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas — as his successors in his role as P.A. chairman and head of the PLO, respectively.

The statement won headlines because discussion of Arafat's successor is considered taboo in Palestinian society. Yet the Israeli daily Ha'aretz noted that Arafat merely was reminding an interviewer of the established succession procedures for the two roles.

In addition, some analysts noted, the reference may help tighten Arafat's control over Karia and Abbas just at the moment that Israel or the United States may be sounding them out as alternatives.

"By setting these guys up, he cements their loyalty," Wittes said.

Neither Sharon's nor Arafat's gestures means the United States necessarily will deal with any other Palestinian leader but Arafat.

"That's not our job," a State Department official said. "We've always said we have to deal with the leaders that are there. It's our interest to work with the popularly elected people of the Palestinian people."

As State Department spokesman Richard Boucher noted last Friday, however, U.S. officials have met frequently with a handful of Palestinian leaders. The officials don't ask their Palestinian interlocutors whether their messages come specifically from Arafat — though Arafat maintains autocratic control over Palestinian affairs. "We've always

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ben-Eliezer speaks out — oops

Israel's defense minister apologized to U.S. officials after he revealed comments they made in private meetings. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer called Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice late last week to apologize after telling the newspaper Yediot Achronot that he was surprised by the tough position senior Bush administration officials had taken against Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, Israel's Channel One Television reported.

"On the subject, Cheney was more extreme than Rehavam Ze'evi," Ben-Eliezer said, referring to the far-right tourism minister assassinated by Palestinian militants last October. "The vice president told me: 'As far as I am concerned, you can also hang'" Arafat.

E.U. calls for elections

E.U. foreign ministers offered a new proposal for ending Israeli-Palestinian violence. Under the proposal, which the ministers put forward during a meeting Saturday in Spain, the Palestinians would hold elections and a state would be declared. The state would be recognized by Israel and then it would be given membership in the United Nations, according to the proposal.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, a chief proponent of the proposal, said the winner of the elections would have a clear mandate to talk peace with Israel. U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher rejected the proposal last Friday.

Bomb kills two Palestinians

A bomb that exploded early killed two Palestinians in their car last Friday near Haifa.

Apparently the Palestinians had planned to detonate the bomb in a coastal area that is always crowded with Israeli youth on Friday nights, but the charge went off prematurely, Israeli police said.



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had a very wide number of contacts with the Palestinian Authority, at all kinds of levels," Boucher said.

Significantly, when Vice President Dick Cheney travels to the Middle East next month, he will bypass the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That would be the first time since the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 that a president or vice president has been in the region and not met with Arafat.

That snub is just the kind of statement Israel is looking for.

"Part of the diplomatic pressure has to be not treating Arafat like a statesman," said an Israeli official in Washington.

In addition to the Palestinian issue, Sharon and Bush reportedly discussed Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Both Bush and Sharon reaffirmed their interest in an eventual Palestinian state, but the onus clearly was placed on Arafat to control violence.

"I can't be any more clear in my position, and that is that he must do everything in his power to fight terror," Bush said.

He also used some of his harshest language to date in describing reports that Arafat himself was tied to a shipment of 50 tons of weapons, seized by Israel on Jan. 3, heading to the Palestinian Authority from Iran.

"Obviously, we were at first surprised and then extremely disappointed when the Karine A showed up, loaded with weapons," Bush said. "Weapons that could have only been intended for one thing, which was to terrorize."

But Bush also had a somewhat new angle to his comments: For the first time, he empathized in detail with the economic plight of the Palestinian people.

"I'm deeply concerned about the plight of the average Palestinian, the moms and dads who are trying to raise their children, to educate their children," Bush said.

He highlighted the \$300 million earmarked this year to the United States Agency for International Development to spend on programs in the West Bank and Gaza.

Those remarks were designed for the Arab lobby and Arab leaders who have been critical of what they see as a lack of effort to help the Palestinian people, who have faced increasing suffering since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000.

"Israel too has steps they can take to improve the environment that sustains positive steps by the Palestinians," the State Department official said. "For Arafat to do what we want him to be doing, there are steps that Israel can take that make for a more fertile environment."

An Israeli official in Washington said his country would "pick up the ball" on that issue.

"We were asked to look into ways, without compromising on terrorism or Israel's security, where we can improve the well-being or quality of life of the Palestinian people," the official said. "We are trying to find the mechanism whereby we can improve the lives of Palestinians, while taking as little risk as possible of terrorist attacks."

On Friday, meeting in New York for a private briefing with leaders of the United Jewish Communities, Sharon said he hopes to implement a "Marshall Plan" for the Palestinians that would create 100,000 new jobs for Palestinians over the next three years, according to UJC President and CEO Stephen Hoffman.

Sharon addressed the conflict with the Palestinians, Israel's economic challenges and the Argentinian crisis, according to John Ruskay, the executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of Greater New York. □

(JTA Staff Writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)

Skater surprises momma

NEW YORK (JTA) — A figure skater had a great surprise for her mother.

Like any good Jewish girl, Sasha Cohen, the 17-year old figure skater from Southern California who is a favorite in the women's figure skating competition, called her mother to check in during last Friday's opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

Then she handed the cell phone to the man sitting next to her and asked him to say a few words to her mother, Galia.

"Hi, I'm the president," George Bush said obligingly. □

JEWISH WORLD

Iran rejects British envoy

Iran rejected the new British ambassador to Tehran, claiming he is a Jew and a spy. Iran's move came after British Prime Minister Tony Blair encouraged Iranian President Mohammad Khatami during a phone conversation last month to accept the appointment of David Reddaway.

British diplomatic sources claim that Reddaway is not Jewish and say he has never worked for MI-6, Britain's foreign intelligence service.

Reddaway worked as a diplomat in Iran twice before, speaks Farsi and is married to an Iranian woman.

After months of delay on whether to accept Reddaway, Iranian hard-liners got their way, saying Blair had not spoken out after President Bush called Iran part of an "axis of evil" in his recent State of the Union address.

UJC holds leadership meeting

Some 2,000 people descended on Washington for the United Jewish Communities' biennial youth leadership conference. Among the speakers during the three-day conference, which began Sunday, are Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and Israel's ambassador to the United States, David Ivry.

N.Y. federation gives to Argentina

UJA-Federation of Greater New York allocated \$4.72 million in new support for the Jewish community of Argentina. Of the total, more than \$720,000 will go to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for relief and welfare operations, while the remaining \$4 million will go to the Jewish Agency for Israel for aliyah and absorption of new Argentine immigrants to Israel.

UJA-Federation says the emergency grant is 20 percent of the United Jewish Communities' initial projection of \$20 million to ease the crisis. However, the UJC's newly formed task force on Argentina has not yet announced its budget. "If the number is increased, we will certainly help," said the spokeswoman for New York's UJA-Federation, Marcia Neeley.

10 Commandments display OK'd

Virginia's House of Delegates approved a bill that would allow public schools in the state to post the Ten Commandments.

The measure, which now goes to the Senate following last Friday's vote in the lower chamber, would require the state Board of Education to write guidelines for displaying the Ten Commandments in classrooms. The bill also calls for the display of three secular documents: the First Amendment, the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Constitution.

Bush supports new faith-based bill; Jewish groups give it a mixed grade

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some call it a mixed bag, others an improvement and still others say it doesn't go far enough.

That makes the latest attempt at faith-based legislation, introduced in the U.S. Senate on Feb. 7, just what people were expecting — a compromise.

President Bush threw his support behind the new bill the same day, after recognizing that a House of Representatives proposal containing controversial points about government funding for religious organizations that provide social services was not going to make it through the Senate.

"Government should not discriminate against faith-based programs, but it should encourage them to flourish," Bush said in the Oval Office as he met with lawmakers.

Many Jewish groups are pleased with parts of the Senate bill that address incentives for charitable giving, but many are still concerned about other parts and have not pledged support for the bill. The Senate bill, which has been in drafting stages for months, calls for tax incentives for charitable donations and an increase in social service funding. But it drops some of the most controversial issues involving funding for religious organizations.

There are a number of tax incentives in the bill designed to spur charitable giving. For example, people who do not itemize their tax returns will be able to deduct for their charitable donations — a \$400 deduction for singles and \$800 for couples — and IRA holders can make charitable donations from their accounts.

The incentives will expire after two years because of severe budgetary constraints from the war on terror, but supporters say they wanted to respond to immediate charity needs. In addition, the bill calls for substantial increases to the Social Services Block Grant, for which the administration requested \$1.7 billion in its budget. The bill calls for an additional \$275 million in 2003 and a boost to \$2.8 billion in 2004.

Senators heralded the bill, also called the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment Act, and its treatment of religious organizations.

"You can't be discriminated against in applying for a grant to do social service work if you have a cross on the wall or a mezuzah on the door or if you praise God in your mission statement," said Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), co-sponsor of the bill.

The bill says religious groups will not be discriminated against and may retain their religious names and icons.

Most Jewish groups have been wary of the increased role of faith-based organizations in social service programming. They fear that the Bush administration's effort to increase partnerships between the federal government and religious institutions runs the risk of eroding the constitutional separation of church and state.

The Anti-Defamation League called the latest bill an improvement over previous drafts, but said it was concerned about provisions that could permit religious indoctrination and employment discrimination. The ADL and other groups say they will closely monitor regulatory actions that could bring about direct funding for faith-based groups that discriminate in their hiring practices.

For now, the bill could defuse calls for a more radical approach to federal aid to religious groups — but administration officials stress that the White House still supports charitable choice. "This debate will go on for a long time," Jim Towey, the new head of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, told JTA.

Other Jewish groups — primarily Orthodox — want faith-based institutions to play a greater role in providing social services and want to lower the wall that separates church and state, as long as minority religions are protected.

The Orthodox Union said the consensus package would help amend inequities that have affected faith-based groups.

Lieberman recalled that when he stood alongside Bush at the announcement of the administration's faith-based initiative last year, he said the devil would be in the details.

"The details along the way, Congress being what it is, turned out to be quite devilish," he said. "But in the end here today, I think we've put the good Lord right into the details." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

French Jews hope Le Pen, election put issue of anti-Semitism on table*By Andrew Diamond*

PARIS (JTA) — With presidential elections approaching, French Jewish leaders see an opportunity to air their grievances with a government they believe has waffled in its response to anti-Semitic aggression.

The election landscape became slightly more treacherous last week as Jean-Marie Le Pen, longtime leader of the extreme-right National Front, announced he has the signatures of 500 elected officials needed to run in the first round of presidential elections this April.

During some three decades on the national stage, Le Pen has made no secret of his anti-Semitic views, a tactic that has contributed to his support in conservative areas of southeastern France.

On a national radio show in 1987, Le Pen called the Nazi gas chambers a mere "detail" of World War II. The comment earned him widespread notoriety — and was followed by the strongest electoral returns of his career.

Le Pen amassed 4.4 million votes, nearly 15 percent of the French electorate, in the first round of the 1988 presidential election. Since that time, his support has been waning — a situation that led a large contingent of National Front members to defect in 1999 and form a new center-right party, the Republican National Movement, under the former party secretary of the National Front, Bruno Megret.

Following Megret's lead, Le Pen is trying to reinvent himself as a more "respectable" candidate of the center-right.

"I am not perfect," he responded recently to a question about his history of anti-Semitic remarks, which Le Pen now refers to as "unfortunate phrases."

Le Pen, 73, appears to have toned down his rhetoric for his fourth — and, in all likelihood, final — presidential bid. But his "France First" platform still contains an anti-Jewish plank.

In December, a National Front primer entitled "Le Pen Was, Is, And Will Be Right" revisited the candidate's past views on the Jewish "lobby" in France.

"We would be wrong to forget the role of the Jewish Masonic International of B'nai B'rith," Le Pen claimed. "This powerful and hidden minority has chosen to erect invisible barriers inside the French people."

So far, it appears doubtful that Le Pen's new posture of respectability will appeal to many voters in the political center.

The French daily *Le Monde*, for example, greeted his campaign announcement with derisive cartoons and the caption, "He presents himself as 'a man of the center-right,' but his program has not changed."

While Le Pen may not be a viable candidate for president, however, his presence in the contest may prove problematic for Jewish organizations seeking a stronger governmental response to a rise in anti-Semitic attacks.

In the latest such incident, anti-Semitic vandals last week defaced a statue in Paris honoring Alfred Dreyfus. The vandals scrawled a Star of David and wrote the words "Dirty Jew" on the statue. In a case that sparked a wave of anti-Semitism in France, Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was falsely convicted of treason in 1894, publicly degraded and sent to Devil's Island, a penal colony in South America. He served five years of a life

sentence before receiving a presidential pardon.

In three other anti-Semitic incidents earlier this year, groups of Arab youths stoned Jewish teen-agers and schoolchildren in Paris suburbs. Those incidents largely passed under the radar of the French media, but the French dailies did provide substantial discussion on anti-Semitic violence at the end of 2001.

In a campaign that thus far has emphasized rising juvenile delinquency and the need for greater security from attacks by teen-agers, French Jews are depending on media attention to force the two presidential front-runners, incumbent Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, to take more assertive positions on anti-Semitic aggression.

Many French Jews view the inclusion of such discussion in the presidential campaign as a key objective, more important even than who wins.

French Jewish leaders long have criticized both leading candidates for downplaying the seriousness of the anti-Semitic incidents. With Le Pen's entry into the race, Jewish leaders potentially will face an additional challenge as they seek to make their voices heard.

Le Pen has in the past made insinuations about the "Jewish lobby's" alleged power over the national media — a message that some fear could color and confuse coverage of Jewish issues. □

Korans with offensive commentary pulled out of Los Angeles schools*By Tom Tugend*

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Hundreds of copies of the Koran have been removed from California schools because of an accompanying anti-Semitic commentary.

School board officials in Los Angeles removed the translations of the Muslim holy book — which were donated to schools by a local Muslim foundation to promote religious understanding following the Sept. 11 terror attacks — after a history teacher noted the derogatory commentary in footnotes to the text. One passage in the commentary calls Jews "men without faith."

Another footnote says of Jews, "Many of them, even if they could read, were no better than illiterates for they knew not their own true scriptures, but read into them what they wanted, or at best their own conjecture."

Copies of "The Meaning of the Holy Quran" were donated to the Los Angeles Unified School District by the Omar Ibn Khattab Foundation.

For unknown reasons, the books were distributed to school libraries last week without undergoing the customary content review, said Jim Konantz, director of information technology for the Los Angeles school district. After the teacher complained about the anti-Semitic passages, Konantz instructed principals to secure all copies in their offices pending a review.

"It's not an issue of whether the Koran should be available," Konantz said. "It's like any other research volume. But these interpretations are certainly in question."

Dafer Dakhil, spokesman for the Omar Ibn Khattab Foundation, which donated the books, told Reuters that "We do not condone anything that is detrimental to understanding. If the books are offensive, they should be removed."

Konantz said a review panel made up of history teachers, representatives of the Jewish community and foundation officials will be appointed to examine the books. □