



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

More Israeli airstrikes in Gaza

Israeli military helicopters struck Palestinian security targets in Gaza City for a second straight day. Palestinian sources said at least 37 people were injured in Monday's sorties.

In another development, Israeli security officials say the Palestinians may already have Kassam-2 rockets in West Bank cities.

Many Israelis fear it is only a matter of time before a rocket is fired into an Israeli population center. [Page 4]

Jewish leaders to visit Jerusalem

More than 100 U.S. Jewish leaders will convene in Jerusalem next week. The annual Israel mission of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will be preceded by a five-day meeting in London with leaders of European Jewry.

In London, the Jewish leaders plan to discuss rising anti-Semitism in Europe and the European Union's anti-Israel policies.

Knesset passes Shin Bet law

Israel's Knesset passed a law Monday that regulates the activities of the Shin Bet domestic security service. "The law regulates, for the first time in the history of the state, the work of the Shin Bet," Justice Minister Meir Sheerit said.

A five-member ministerial committee will now monitor the Shin Bet, which will also report to a subcommittee of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

The Shin Bet's interrogations methods, including the controversial policy of using "moderate physical pressure" against terror suspects, were not included in the law.

Butcher shop vandalized

Anti-Semitic vandals painted a Star of David and the word "Jud" on the window of a kosher butcher shop in the French city of Toulouse.

Commenting on the Feb. 6 incident, a local Jewish official said it was "far from isolated." Arie Bensemhoun added: "The insults, the death threats, the spitting are almost daily events for the students of Jewish schools, for rabbis, and anyone else who can be identified as Jews." Between 20,000 and 25,000 Jews live in Toulouse.

NEWS ANALYSIS

To be or not to be? Arafat ponders mortality as Israel eyes successors

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Something is happening to the man who used to be described as the "cat with seven souls."

Yasser Arafat, 72, president of the Palestinian Authority and the "symbol of the Palestinian revolution," is now talking about his own mortality.

Arafat recently told one of the many groups of admirers who visited him in his besieged Ramallah headquarters that he would come to a liberated Jerusalem, either as a victor or a shahid, the Arabic term for martyr.

Then, meeting last week with journalists from the Gulf states and Egypt, Arafat mentioned two of his potential successors — Ahmed Karia, the speaker of the Palestine legislative council, and Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas.

The statement garnered headlines because discussion of life after Arafat is considered taboo in Palestinian society. Yet the Ha'aretz news paper noted that Arafat merely was reminding his interviewers of the succession procedures for his roles as head of the Palestinian Authority — which governs Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip — and of the PLO, which represents Palestinians there and in the Diaspora.

Still, the statement was seen as Arafat's way of responding to growing Israeli pressure to replace him, a demand that has failed to win international backing.

President Bush did not support the idea of replacing Arafat when he met last week with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Washington. The forum of foreign ministers of the European Union, which met at the same time, reiterated its recognition of Arafat as the leader of the Palestinian people.

Enjoying this measure of international backing, Arafat was trying to pull the rug from underneath the Israeli demand. The message was: "We are an organized society. It is already quite clear who will replace me if I 'disappear' — but in the meantime, I am the boss."

Indeed, he is. Surrounded by Israeli tanks, some analysts say Arafat is more popular than during the days when he traveled the world on behalf of the Palestinian people. He receives daily delegations of support from the international community, and many Palestinians draw analogies between Arafat's personal state of siege and the general situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A "tent of support" was erected in Gaza, and has become the focus of daily gatherings that draw even leaders of the Hamas opposition.

No wonder the Hamas leaders come: They have been given a virtual green light for their terror attacks. Following Israel Air Force attacks on Nablus last week, prison doors were opened to release Hamas prisoners, and mobs that attacked prisons in Jenin and Hebron — encountering no opposition from the guards — released scores more.

As a result, national unity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is blooming.

Almost everyone who knows Arafat rules out the possibility of him resigning. Uri Avneri, leader of the Israeli far-left group Gush Shalom, said he has never seen Arafat as vibrant and confident as he was on Avneri's visit three weeks ago — though Ha'aretz journalist Tom Segev, who also attended, came away with an impression of Arafat as broken and demoralized.

Ha'aretz correspondent Danny Rubinstein, a long-time Arafat observer, said Arafat would never resign, because he has no reason to live but to lead the Palestinian people.

Arafat is married and has a daughter, but he hardly sees his family, which spends most of its time in Paris. He is devoted to his post, generally working late into the night,

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.N. envoy blames Israel

The U.N. envoy for the Middle East blamed Israel for the deteriorating security situation in the region. Terje Roed Larsen told Army Radio that ever since Israel declared Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat "irrelevant" in December, he is more relevant than ever.

Larsen also condemned Israeli retaliatory air strikes Sunday night that damaged a U.N. compound in the Gaza Strip. Israel apologized for the wounding of two UN employees in the strike.

Woman was suicide bomber

The woman who carried out a bombing last month in Jerusalem was indeed a suicide bomber, according to Israeli officials.

The officials reached the conclusion over the weekend after an investigation into whether Wafa Idris had killed herself intentionally, or had planned to just plant the bomb or give it to someone else.

One Israeli man was killed and more than 100 were wounded in the Jan. 27 attack.

60 freed from Hebron jail

Some 300 Palestinians stormed a jail in Hebron and freed 60 inmates there.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists were among those freed Monday, according to Israel's Channel 2 television. Army Radio reported that Palestinian security forces made no attempt to turn back the mob.

One Nation to leave coalition

Israel's One Nation Party decided to leave the government. The party, which holds two Knesset seats, said it was opposed to the 2002 budget.

The party's leader, legislator Amir Peretz, said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had failed to uphold his commitment to improve the lot of the lower income groups.

and reportedly has few interests but his job. It has been this way ever since Arafat formed the Fatah movement in Cairo in 1964.

Indeed, for years he even refused to marry, saying he already was wedded — to Palestine. But what if Arafat indeed "disappeared"? Israel has pledged that it will not harm Arafat physically, yet in recent weeks Sharon has been more explicit than ever that he would like to see Arafat replaced.

The question became even more relevant after Sharon met two weeks ago with Karia and Abbas, the two Palestinian architects of the Oslo peace accords. Israel seemed to be signaling that here, finally, were Palestinian leaders it could do business with.

Abbas was asked about his chances of succeeding Arafat. He responded angrily that the matter was not on the agenda, and that the Sharon meeting had taken place with Arafat's full backing.

Arafat was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in general elections in 1996. According to Palestinian election law, once Arafat no longer functions as P.A. president, the speaker of the legislative council — currently Karia — will take over for an interim period of two months, followed by general elections.

Then the real race begins. Contrary to Israeli wishes, neither Karia nor Abbas enjoys widespread support among Palestinians. They are perceived as the "Tunis leadership," a group of oligarchs who grew wealthy during decades in exile and who have never really shared the plight of the local population.

They also would face the strong opposition of Hamas, the fundamentalist organization that has gained considerable support since the intifada began nearly a year and a half ago. In Israel, indeed, it has been customary for years to adopt Foreign Minister Shimon Peres' thesis that "whoever doesn't want Arafat will get Hamas." Yet Hamas activists themselves say the organization is not built for a head-on confrontation with the Palestinian Authority and the main PLO party, Fatah.

Hamas' main drawback in a hypothetical election is that it has no hand in the bureaucracy of the Palestinian Authority. The authority provides jobs for tens of thousands of families, who have a vested interest in keeping Hamas out of power.

Association with Fatah, Arafat's political party, has been another means of accessing the benefits of government.

On the ground in the territories, the real power belongs to the various paramilitary and security groups. The two most conspicuous security chiefs also are considered potential leadership candidates — Mohammad Dahlan of Gaza and Jibril Rajoub of the West Bank. Both are "veterans" of Israeli jails from the 1970s and 1980s, have acquired considerable experience in dealing with the Israeli authorities over the past eight years and are considered pragmatists regarding a possible peace with Israel.

Both are considered likely candidates for the throne, although, for obvious reasons, they have never said so openly. Their iron-fisted control of the Palestinian security organs could prove an effective tool in tipping the electoral scales in their favor.

Two other potential candidates are Marwan Barghouti, the leader of Fatah's Tanzim militias, and Sari Nusseibeh, the PLO official in charge of Jerusalem.

Until the outbreak of the intifada, Barghouti was a shadowy figure and supporter of the Oslo accords. Since the intifada began, however, Barghouti's men have taken a leading role in terrorism.

"If the Israelis can attack us in Ramallah," he often says, "then we have the legitimate right to attack the Israelis in Tel Aviv."

Barghouti's militancy has helped him to emerge as a national figure — yet some Israelis still believe that he remains a pragmatist at heart.

Nusseibeh, scion of an influential Jerusalem family, has emerged on the national stage in recent months with moderate statements urging a settlement with Israel and saying that Palestinians will have to forgo the "right" of refugees to return to their former homes in Israel.

That has made Nusseibeh the darling of Israeli leftists eager to prove that there still is someone to talk to on the Palestinian side — though others consider Nusseibeh too effete and intellectual to gain support on the Palestinian street.

For example, Rajoub has said — off the record — that Nusseibeh is more of an armchair ideologist than a political leader, while Barghouti is mostly hot air.

Other names on the list of potential Palestinian leaders include Nabil Sha'ath, a former businessman and now the P.A. minister responsible for economic development, and Yasser Abed Rabbo, who serves as Palestinian minister of information. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Iran preparing suicide missions?

Iranian officials marked the 23rd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution with a series of anti-U.S. and anti-Israel speeches. Addressing the tens of thousands of Iranians who turned out in Tehran on Monday, President Mohammad Khatami defended Iran's opposition to Israel. "It is not acceptable for you to observe a nation become displaced," he told the crowd. "You are against Israel's state terrorism. You are supporters of the rights of the Palestinian nation."

In a related development, the director of a leading Iranian daily newspaper said in remarks published over the weekend, "Many of our young people are now preparing for suicide operations against U.S. and Israeli soldiers with the aim of vengeance."

Hillary Clinton to visit Israel

Sen. Hillary Clinton is expected to visit Israel later this month. The senator from New York initiated the visit as a show of support for Israel, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reported.

During the one-day visit, Clinton is scheduled to receive a security briefing, meet with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and visit a hospital where terror victims are recovering.

Russia: We won't harm Israel

Russia's prime minister pledged his country will not do anything to harm Israel's security situation.

The comments by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov came in a recent meeting in Moscow with U.S. Jewish leaders representing the NCSJ, B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League.

The possible graduation of Russia out of the trade restrictions imposed by the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and Russia's alleged sale of nuclear technology to Iran were also discussed.

ADL honors Bush Sr.

Former President George Bush was honored for aiding the immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

On Feb. 7, Bush received the Joseph Prize for Human Rights from the Anti-Defamation League in Palm Beach, Fla., for helping expedite the emigration of 16,000 Ethiopian Jews in 1991 by offering to mediate in Ethiopia's civil war.

Hallmark offers Purim cards

Hallmark Cards is offering greeting cards for Purim. The cards are being produced by the American-based company's Tree of Life brand, which focuses on religious and ethnic cards.

Many of the cards feature the word "I'chaim," according to the company's Web site.

Meeting with Russian president seen as historic and very unusual

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Rabbi Berel Lazar has met many times with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Until last week, however, all their meetings took place with others present and were linked to a particular event — such as last winter, when Lazar made the Kremlin kitchen kosher and then dined in a Kremlin palace with Putin, Israeli President Moshe Katsav and some other Jewish VIPs.

So the Feb. 7 meeting — during which a variety of issues, including the return of a synagogue building in the city of Kaluga and Russia's possible graduation from long-standing U.S. trade restrictions linked to Jewish emigration — was unusual.

Some observers here are calling the one-on-one talks historic.

"It is the first time in the Russian history that the czar spent an hour with a rabbi tete-a-tete, just talking," said Alexander Lokshin, a Moscow-based historian specializing in Russian Jewry.

When a group of rabbis elected Lazar as chief rabbi in the late spring of 2000, he became the country's second chief rabbi, sharing the title with Adolph Shayeveich.

But the Putin meeting culminated a busy 18 months for Lazar, who has kept an active schedule, in contrast to Shayeveich. In effect, Lazar has made himself the de facto chief rabbi for Russia's 600,000 Jews.

These are just a few of Lazar's actions:

- He flew 10 time zones to the city of Khabarovsk in the Far East to open a Jewish community center and meet with the region's governor;
- He flew to the city of Samara to hand over a new Torah scroll to the local community and meet with the regional governor to discuss ways to combat anti-Semites.
- After an August plane crash on the Black Sea killed 78 people, including 68 Jews, Lazar went to the region to work with relatives of the deceased.

Some still worry about Lazar's ties to the Kremlin. Specifically, they worry that if Lazar's patron — diamond tycoon Lev Levayev — loses influence with the Kremlin, it could spell trouble for the Jews. Representatives of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union downplay that idea.

"Some people think it is because of Levayev's money and his connections in the Kremlin that the administration has chosen Rabbi Lazar as the representative of the Jews," said Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of the Federation. "But the true reason is that the Kremlin people see that Lazar is a real leader who is running a vast working network."

In fact, some observers see the meeting as a snub to Levayev, and perhaps a harbinger of things to come.

Levayev reportedly has close ties with Alexander Voloshin, the head of the Kremlin administration. Voloshin is a former business partner of Boris Berezovsky, a self-exiled Jewish media tycoon and one-time influential Kremlin insider.

All three members of this influential triangle reportedly are losing power. The television channel owned by Berezovsky was recently shut down; there are persistent rumors of the imminent sacking of Voloshin; and some see signs that Levayev's influence with the Kremlin may be decreasing.

According to a source in the Kremlin administration, Levayev wanted to take part in the Putin/Lazar meeting, but was not invited.

Efforts to reach Levayev were unsuccessful. □

Judge: Stop Bible classes

NEW YORK (JTA) — A U.S. judge ordered an end to Bible classes that have been taught for 51 years in the public schools of a Tennessee county.

The classes in Rhea County violate the First Amendment's clause calling for the separation of church and state, the judge ruled last Friday. The county is where the famed "Scopes Monkey Trial" was held in 1925. In that trial, schoolteacher John Scopes was prosecuted for teaching evolution instead of the biblical creation account. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Diplomatic considerations prevent harsher Israeli responses to terror

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — During his trip to the United States, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon warned that a Palestinian rocket attack on Israeli communities would be met with a harsh response “unlike anything else” Israel ever meted out before.

On Sunday, shortly before Sharon returned from a three-day visit to the United States, such a rocket attack occurred — as did a deadly Palestinian shooting attack in Beersheba, which until now had remained on the periphery of the intifada.

The Israeli retaliation, however, was little different from earlier ones: Israeli jets fired missiles Sunday night at Palestinian security targets in Gaza City.

More airstrikes on Gaza targets followed Monday.

Palestinian sources said at least 37 people were injured in Monday's sorties.

In consultations with senior political and security officials Sunday night, Sharon approved land and air operations in response to the Palestinian attacks.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the rocket attack will prompt Sharon to order an escalation of his own.

According to some Israeli media reports, Sharon and his advisers decided on a new type of retaliation, but did not specify what it would be.

But as Israeli commentators noted this week, diplomatic constraints may prevent Sharon from ordering a broader military response.

Sharon told reporters on his return to Israel that the United States understands that Israel “has its own policies.”

But the commentators observed that while Sharon and his American hosts may have agreed in their discussions to keep the pressure on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, the United States is primarily concerned that there be no escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it could interfere with the U.S. campaign against terror.

Prior to his visit to Washington, Sharon said he would call on President Bush to cut off ties with Arafat. But before he met with Bush on Feb. 7 at the White House, U.S. officials made it clear that they would press Arafat to clamp down on terrorism — but would not sever ties with him.

During the meeting with Bush, Sharon did not ask for a severing of ties with Arafat. Instead, he asked that the United States begin cultivating a relationship with other top Palestinian officials.

On Sunday, Palestinians fired two rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Israeli army officials said the Kassam-2 rocket, built by Hamas, was a type not previously used in the more than 16 months of violence.

Army Radio reported that security forces were examining whether one of the rockets in Sunday's attack was aimed at Sharon's Negev ranch.

The two rockets fired Sunday landed harmlessly near Israeli farming communities outside the Gaza Strip, but Israelis fear it is only a matter of time before one is fired into a population center.

Last week, Israeli troops in the West Bank intercepted a Jenin-bound truck carrying Kassam rockets and launchers.

Israeli security sources believe the Palestinians intended to fire

them toward Afula. Despite that one successful interception, some Israeli security officials believe that the Palestinians may already have Kassam-2 rockets in West Bank cities.

Israel Radio quoted these sources as saying that Sunday's rocket attack from Gaza may have been a test of how the missiles work and how Israel responds.

According to the sources, there may be more such rockets in Tulkarm, Kalkilya, Bethlehem and Ramallah that are ready to be fired at Israeli cities.

Israeli officials say the Kassam-2 carries some 10 pounds of explosives and has a range of about five miles, making it capable of reaching Israeli cities if fired from the West Bank and portions of Gaza.

Some Israeli commentators are saying Israel may reoccupy Palestinian areas close to Israel for an extended period to keep the rockets out of range.

Two Israeli soldiers were killed and at least five other people were seriously wounded in Sunday's attack in Beersheba.

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

The lunchtime attack occurred when two gunmen in a car opened fire at a cafe located a block from the army's southern command headquarters. The cafe was frequented by soldiers who serve at the base.

Many soldiers were on the streets during their lunch break, and they quickly began firing back at the attackers, who were shot and killed within minutes, witnesses said.

One of the gunmen wore an explosives belt, but he was killed before he had a chance to detonate the bomb.

“I was on the street and suddenly the two got out of a car and started firing in all directions,” Capt. Guy Shaham told Israel Radio.

“I whipped out my gun and started firing back at them.”

As rescue teams treated the wounded police launched searches amid reports, which later proved false, that a third terrorist dressed as an Israeli soldier had fled the scene.

Sunday's attack in Beersheba followed other deadly assaults on Israelis over the weekend.

On Saturday, Atala Lipovsky, 79, was killed when Palestinians fired on her car in the West Bank.

Last Friday, Israeli law student Moran Amit, 25, was stabbed to death by a group of Arab teen-agers who jumped her and a friend as they walked near a popular promenade overlooking Jerusalem's Old City.

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 that a bullet had entered his body through his rectum.

As the Israeli death toll mounted, Israel's police commissioner released terror total from last year.

Shlomo Aharonishky said terror attacks were up 337 percent in 2001 compared with the previous year.

A total of 208 people were killed in attacks last year and another 1,523 wounded, he said, adding that 2001 was Israel's worst year of terror since the establishment of the state in 1948.

There were 90 attacks in Jerusalem last year, including 35 bombings, 28 shooting attacks, 10 stabbings and six mortar attacks, he said. □