



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

6 Israelis killed in ambush

Six Israelis were killed in a Palestinian shooting attack Tuesday near Ramallah.

A seventh Israeli was seriously wounded and was evacuated to a nearby hospital after the terrorists opened fire on a mobile home and a nearby building, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Bomber kills self in bus attack

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up Tuesday after being pushed off a bus near a West Bank settlement.

The Palestinian detonated an explosive charge seconds after the driver and passengers, who considered the man's bearing and his heavy coat suspicious, prevented him from boarding the bus near Mehola in the Jordan Valley. There were no other casualties.

Israel retaliates for attacks

At least eight Palestinians were killed Tuesday as Israel retaliated for a series of recent terror attacks.

In one incident, Israeli helicopters attacked the Hamas information office in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, killing at least two people and wounding five.

Israeli jets also bombed Palestinian security facilities in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Israeli action came a day after four Israelis were killed in two separate Palestinian attacks.

Israel's High Court issued an injunction Tuesday freezing the army's planned demolition of some 20 Palestinian houses near the site of one of Monday's attacks.

JCPA: Protect civil liberties

Jewish communal leaders say the Bush administration has not struck a balance between civil rights and national security. In a hotly debated resolution passed this week at the annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs in Washington, community leaders praised the White House for its overall efforts in the war on terrorism.

But they also said issues of attorney-client privilege, detention of immigrants and military tribunals have raised civil liberties concerns. Several major Jewish organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith and Hadassah, voted against the resolution.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Seeing Argentine crisis firsthand spurs UJC to pledge \$5 million in aid

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — For Karen Shapira, the United Jewish Communities's fact-finding tour to Argentina last week made a deep impression.

"Two weeks ago, I knew the figures" of Argentina's economic crisis.

"But to be here, to see the effects of the crisis on the middle class," is something else, said Shapira, chair of the Overseas Pillar of the UJC, the umbrella for the North American Jewish federation movement.

Shapira was one of a group of UJC leaders who traveled to Buenos Aires last week to evaluate the needs of the country's Jews during Argentina's continuing economic collapse.

Before the mission was over, UJC leaders in North America, in a conference call with mission delegates, had approved some \$5 million in emergency aid for food, shelter and medicine.

The funds, to be distributed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, are expected to come from local federations.

Steven Schwager, chief operating officer of the JDC, welcomed the development, and said the JDC will continue to look for additional funds to meet the estimated \$8.7 million Argentine Jews will need in 2002.

UJC still must determine its overall budget for the Argentine emergency, taking into account the increasing needs of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which is helping to fund the emigration and absorption of Argentine Jews to Israel.

Argentina was a major focus at this week's meeting in Israel of the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors.

While in Buenos Aires, the UJC contingent met with local Jewish professionals who coordinate welfare programs, visited centers focused on helping Jews emigrate to Israel and met with religious and other community leaders.

They also met with ordinary Jews, most of them belonging to middle- or former middle-class families in a Jewish community of about 200,000 people. These people shared their stories and needs with the UJC visitors.

Though Shapira had read about the Argentine situation, she emphasized that the people she met in welfare centers were not the kind of people she had imagined in such a situation — educated, hard-working members of the middle class.

"For me, one of the really important things here is to meet Jewish leadership, to see how they organize," Shapira said.

She also noticed how much the leaders used phrases like "re-engineering" and "cooperation" in describing their efforts to reorganize to help a community that has difficulty paying membership fees and dues to Jewish institutions.

Through the windows of the group's van, Shapira saw people begging and shops closed as a result of the economic crisis. Beyond that, the streets looked normal. Under the surface, however, the situation is anything but normal.

The current crisis has closed banks and decimated small business people, many of whom are Jews.

For Richard Bernstein, the co-chair of the UJC's Argentinian Response Task Force, one of the most shocking discoveries was "how quickly things are happening. In a question of the last six weeks, there are parts of the Jewish community who started to have urgent needs," he said. "Some are uncertain about food and shelter for next week."

The UJC group also visited Emanu El Social Assistance Center, which works with

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon: No change in policy

Ariel Sharon said he does not intend to bring down the Palestinian Authority, despite the deteriorating security situation. The Israeli prime minister made the comment Tuesday in response to calls from members of his Likud Party to take a tough stand with the Palestinians.

Sharon met with security heads Monday night to discuss Israel's response to the latest surge in Palestinian terror attacks. Israel Radio reported that Sharon and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer agreed not to change current policy, but to seek ways to vary it.

Palestinians fire rockets at Israel

Palestinians fired four Kassam missiles Tuesday at two Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. The missiles fell in an open area and caused no casualties or damage. The rockets were fired from about three miles away, Israel Radio reported.

Bombing suspects nabbed

Three men believed to be connected to Al Qaida were arrested in Turkey for planning to carry out an attack in Israel.

Last Friday, police in eastern Turkey arrested two Palestinians and a Jordanian believed to be on their way to Israel to stage a bomb attack, Turkish officials said Tuesday.

A police spokesman in Ankara said the three entered Turkey illegally from Iran and told police they were planning to travel to Istanbul and from there to Israel, where they had received orders to carry out a bomb attack in a crowded area.

Palestinians support talks

More than two-thirds of the Palestinians favor holding final-status peace talks with Israel. The finding came in a poll carried out by Beir Zeit University in the West Bank.



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the support of the JDC and Tzedaka, an Argentine Jewish social services organization.

At the assistance center, they talked to five formerly middle-class families who have become part of the "new poor."

Just meeting their basic needs — food, medicine and shelter — now is a struggle.

Schwager said meeting the five families made a deep impression on him.

"They were clearly middle class, and now they have nothing. They have no hope. It is so hard to imagine," he said. "I think this is an emergency situation. And Jews around the world need to know about it."

The group also visited Comedores Populares Israelitas Argentinos, an independent welfare institution that, with financial help from the JDC, provides kosher meals to approximately 90 people a day.

"There are more people willing to come for lunch, but we do not have the money to feed them," a spokesman said.

The JDC estimates that it will need to assist 21,000 Jews this year — and, perhaps, for many years. The delegation also met with Jews preparing to emigrate to Israel who were in the Jewish Agency office. The office is in the AMIA building, the central address for Argentine Jewry.

According to the Jewish Agency, about 4,600 people have inquired about moving to Israel since the beginning of 2002.

In January, 210 Argentine Jews arrived in Israel, another 330 are expected to depart in February and 500 more are expected in March.

Both Jews staying in Argentina and those leaving need help, Bernstein said.

After touring Comedores, the group was on its way to the Hebraica Jewish Institution, a social and cultural center, when a young student stopped them. Apparently needing to vent his frustration, he told them about his lack of hope for the future.

During another part of the trip, in front of the AMIA building, a man was handing out pamphlets for Hebrew classes. "Hebrew classes for emigrants for five pesos" — approximately \$2.50 — "each hour," the low-quality, photocopied pamphlet read.

David Sarnat, the Jewish Agency's executive vice president, who was on the mission, picked it up.

"You will speak Hebrew in two weeks. Guaranteed," said the man, who apparently was looking for a way to survive the economic crisis.

At the same time, his classes also serve the needs of those Jews reacting to the economic collapse by moving to Israel. □

Czech prime minister denies he compared Arafat to Hitler

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Prime Minister Milos Zeman has denied comparing Yasser Arafat to Hitler during an interview with an Israeli newspaper.

Zeman, who sparked worldwide controversy after his published comments appeared this week in Ha'aretz, said on Tuesday that his comments had been misinterpreted.

Zeman said in a statement that he had never made an Arafat-Hitler comparison.

When asked by Ha'aretz "about the possibility of such a comparison, I replied: 'Of course it is not my duty to pass judgment on Arafat.' However, the published text read: 'Of course. It is not my duty . . .'"

"I did not want to speak on the question of comparison between Arafat and Hitler. I only wanted to express my natural readiness to answer the given question," Zeman added.

Zeman also stressed that his government, in line with the joint foreign and security policies of the European Union, considers a peaceful solution to conflict in the Middle East as "the only realistic way" out of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

"I regard as desirable the return of all the parties involved to the negotiating table," Zeman said. "The peace negotiations must take into account the Palestinians' legal rights, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and the security needs of the State of Israel."

Earlier Tuesday, Czech President Vaclav Havel said he was "deeply troubled" by the remarks that appeared in Ha'aretz as Zeman wrapped up his visit to Israel on Monday. □

JEWISH WORLD

Houston businessman touted as next chair of Holocaust council

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush seems to have settled on a new chairman for the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

Fred Zeidman, the prospective council head, is an old friend of the president and an outsider on Holocaust issues — and Jewish leaders have only good things to say about him.

The president and director of an industrial service company in Houston, Zeidman, 55, holds leadership positions in the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and the American Jewish Committee.

Sources say Bush already has made his decision, but there has been no official announcement of the new chair or other council appointees. An announcement could be made in coming weeks, sources say. It's unlikely that any of the current council members whose terms are now expiring will be asked to stay on, as Bush has shown a willingness to keep previous administrations' appointees only in rare situations.

Zeidman's leadership and fundraising skills, as well as his close personal relationship with Bush, put him in good stead with those familiar with the council.

No one seems concerned that Zeidman is not a Holocaust scholar and has not been very involved in Holocaust issues. He likely would be surrounded by scholars on the council, which runs the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Jewish leaders say scholarship is less necessary for the council chair than good administrative skills and pragmatism.

Ruth Mandel, vice chair of the council, said the chairman must be able to play a leadership role, understand a complicated board and have good political skills.

Zeidman is an extremely committed and knowledgeable Jewish leader, according to Menachem Rosensaft, a council member.

Zeidman would be the first chair from the post-Holocaust generation, which would be ideal in preparing the museum for the challenges of the 21st century, Rosensaft said.

The next years are an important transition period, as the impact of aging Holocaust survivors lessens, according to the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman. The chair must find a way to preserve survivors' memory, he said.

Zeidman is up to the challenge, Foxman believes.

The council has had some troubles in recent years, especially as a crisis in confidence developed over the leadership of Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg. A longtime council member, Greenberg is an Orthodox rabbi well known in the Jewish community for his writings on the Holocaust.

Greenberg was dogged by controversy after it was disclosed that he had sent a letter on museum stationery in December 2000 asking President Clinton to pardon fugitive financier Marc Rich.

Some council members called for Greenberg's resignation, but a majority ultimately stuck by him.

Greenberg also found himself in hot water for a November 2000 speech at the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly, which some considered unduly critical of Israel's response to Palestinian attacks.

Greenberg and his supporters responded that his comments were taken out of context and that he was the victim of an ideological vendetta. □

Protests greet Assad in Italy

ROME (JTA) — A small group of Jews and human rights activists protested an official visit to Italy by Syrian President Bashar Assad. About 20 people waved placards and unfurled a banner at Rome's Ciampino military airport, where Assad arrived Tuesday.

Later, about 50 people demonstrated outside the Quirinale presidential palace. Assad is meeting senior Italian leaders and also Pope John Paul II on his three-day visit, his first to the West since the Sept. 11 attacks. □

High court to hear voucher case

The Supreme Court is set to hear a landmark case on the use of school vouchers. The high court, which will hear oral arguments Wednesday in the case of a Cleveland voucher program, will determine whether providing government funds for students to attend parochial or private schools is constitutional.

The use of vouchers remains a divisive issue among Jewish organizations. Many groups oppose them on the grounds of church-state separation, but others back the program, which could help parents send their children to Jewish schools. The court's ruling is expected this spring.

Presidents Conference in London

During a visit to London, members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations "heard strong statements of support for Israel" from Britain's foreign secretary and opposition leader, the group's executive vice chairman, Malcolm Hoenlein, told JTA.

Members of the Conference of Presidents kicked off their annual Israel mission last week in London, where they were joined by leaders of European Jewish communities to address the growing threat of anti-Semitism across Europe and E.U. policy toward Israel. The Conference of Presidents delegation arrives in Israel on Wednesday.

Muslim cleric held in London

A Muslim cleric who allegedly urged his followers to kill Jews was arrested. Abdullah Faisal, 38, was questioned in a London police station Tuesday.

British Lawmakers had called for action after newspaper reports said Faisal had toured Britain calling for the killing of Jews and nonbelievers. The London Times reported he was selling cassettes urging all Muslim males to train for battle and calling on boys to learn to use Kalashnikov assault rifles.

'Jewish' performance at Olympics

Israel's Olympic ice dancing team used a distinctly Jewish theme in their performance. Galit Chait and Sergei Sakhnovsky skated to Jewish folk music and had large Stars of David emblazoned on their costumes. They finished sixth in Monday night's competition in Salt Lake City.

AJCommittee helps refugees

The American Jewish Committee gave \$50,000 to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees for relief in Afghanistan.

Monday's contribution is the second major donation from the AJCommittee to the U.N. agency, and the second time the group has worked with the agency to aid Muslim refugees.

American Jewish groups bring mostly unified message to Israel

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — U.S. Jewish organizational leaders headed for Israel this week with an unusually unified message.

Ideological divisions still exist among American Jews, who like Israelis, have divided views about the best way to end the violence.

But given the daily fire between Israel and the Palestinians, the Conference of Presidents of American Jewish Organizations — the coordinating body of 52 national American Jewish organizations — is rallying to Israel's defense.

American Jews no longer have the luxury to debate nuanced solutions, many of the delegates say. In fact, some say, they no longer know what the solution is.

"I remember a time when American Jewish organizations thought they had the answers in their own hip pocket," said Phil Baum, senior adviser on world affairs for the American Jewish Congress. "The Israelis were simply incompetent, and we knew better. We had answers they couldn't perceive up close."

But that philosophy has fallen on its face.

Humbled by the second Palestinian intifada, which has been raging for 17 months, American Jewry can no longer "come forward with magic formulas to find peace for Israel" that Israel can't find for itself, said Baum, the former executive director of the AJCongress.

Instead, the message of the solidarity mission is to "help Israel in a moment of great travail," Baum said.

The group's five-day mission, which was beginning Wednesday, was slated to include sessions on a wide variety of topics, including the regional threats of Iran and Iraq, Ethiopian Jewry and the economic, political and security fallout of Sept. 11.

They were scheduled to be briefed by top officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

The mission kicked off in London where members joined leaders of Jewish communities from 23 European countries to address the growing threat of anti-Semitism there and the policies of the European Union vis-a-vis Israel.

In transit from London to Jerusalem on Tuesday, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, told JTA they "heard strong statements of support for Israel" from Britain's opposition leader and foreign secretary.

Jack Straw also told the group he would look into the issue of E.U. money supporting Palestinian textbooks that are hostile to Israel.

In addition, the Conference is establishing a network to better communicate with Europe's Jewish leaders who feel isolated amid rising anti-Semitism in their countries, which have also seen an increase in Muslim populations, he said.

The Conference of Presidents mission included a broad spectrum of political and religious organizations.

Many Jewish leaders say they view this week's mission as a listening tour, not a soapbox.

Baum seemed to speak for many members when he said, "We're not sure what Israel's positions ought to be; it's up to them primarily to define them."

But when asked about the prospect of renewed negotiations

with the Palestinians, many— particularly those to the right or left of the ideological center — are quick to propose their disparate ideas. For example, Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, spurned Peres' peace plan, which calls for a cease-fire, an immediate recognition of an initial Palestinian state and a yearlong negotiation over its form.

"A man who's been completely wrong in his understanding about Arafat and his regime for the last eight years," said Klein, "is not a man anyone should take seriously today."

Peres' proposal "to essentially create a new Arab terrorist state under Arafat is the height of folly," Klein said

On the other end of the political spectrum, Mark Rosenblum, founder and policy director of Americans for Peace Now, said Peres' plan is "an interesting way of breaking the deadlock."

Although Rosenblum said he adhered to the mission's message of solidarity, he also was going to offer his group's line: "It's not working, stupid," he said, referring to Sharon's military reprisals.

The onus is on Arafat to crack down on terrorism first, Rosenblum said, but Sharon has provided a "disincentive" by conditioning negotiations on seven days of absolute nonviolence.

That demand is something no leader could guarantee, he said, and is tantamount to preventing an ultimate cease-fire.

Instead, Rosenblum thinks that Sharon should implement the American proposals initiated by CIA Director George Tenet, George Mitchell and special envoy Anthony Zinni.

Zinni recently tried to resurrect the cease-fire proposed last year by Tenet as a step toward implementing the recommendations of the Mitchell Commission, a U.S.-led international panel that set out a series of confidence-building measures to help end the Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Rosenblum also said that Arafat's announcement to halt terror in mid-December was followed by relative calm, but Israel did not end its closures on Palestinian areas.

Dovish or hawkish, both approaches — the Oslo peace process, on the one hand, and Israeli administration of the territories, on the other — "have been shown to be erroneous" in ending the conflict, according to Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of ARZA/World Union, the Reform movement's Zionist arm.

"This is the source of much of the frustration in the Jewish world because there is no apparent solution that either wing can put its trust in. And if there are no wings, then the process can not fly," Hirsch said.

Klein believes the current intifada has united among U.S. Jewish leaders around what is considered a more hawkish approach, but others think the current violence is only exacerbating pre-existing differences. That is, skeptics will cite the intifada as reason to continue a hard-line approach, while progressives will point to the futility of military response in ending the conflict.

"The umbrella's firmly up with everyone standing under it when it comes to broad-scale criticism of Arafat and the P.A.," Rosenblum said.

But just as in the Israeli unity government, there are "significant, unresolved differences" among American Jews. "Differences still exist even in this late date of 17 months into murder and mayhem of the intifada," he said.

For the moment, at least, "many of the differences today are subdued, because Israel is under assault," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"If God willing, we'll move into the era of peace and tranquility, those differences will surface again," he said. □