



# Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Three soldiers killed in Gaza

Three Israeli soldiers were killed Thursday when their tank ran over a land mine in the Gaza Strip.

One soldier was killed immediately, two were burned alive in the tank, and two more were injured, according to Israel Radio.

### Ramallah withdrawal ordered

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered Israeli troops to withdraw from Ramallah.

In an announcement issued Thursday, Sharon said the massive Israel Defense Force operation in the West Bank city had been a success. A redeployment around the city will be complete but gradual, and the siege around the city will continue, Israel Radio reported.

Earlier Thursday, four members of the Palestinian security forces were killed during clashes with Israeli troops.

### U.S. envoy Zinni arrives in Israel

U.S. Middle East envoy Anthony Zinni arrived in Israel. Zinni was expected to meet Prime Minister Ariel Sharon later Thursday before holding talks with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on Friday.

He also is expected to convene a meeting of top-level security officials from the two sides.

Hours after Zinni's arrival, the United States called on Israel to withdraw all its troops from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "We want to see a full withdrawal," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Thursday.

### Y.U. nominee withdraws name

The only official nominee for the presidency of Yeshiva University withdrew from the process. Dov Zakheim, U.S. undersecretary of defense, had been the sole choice of the search committee seeking a successor to Rabbi Norman Lamm, who will retire this summer after 26 years at the Y.U. helm. It is not clear why Zakheim withdrew his name.

Zakheim's candidacy had angered some in the university and in its centrist Orthodox constituency, both because he is not known as a religious scholar and because he played a critical role in the late 1980s in the Defense Department's decision to stop supporting the development of Israel's Lavi military plane.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Orthodox Jews turn to God to lift Israel out of the depths

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — David Ofman, a real estate lawyer, slipped out of his lower Manhattan office for a long lunch break.

Instead of heading to a restaurant, Ofman — who was fasting for the day — headed for special afternoon prayer services on behalf of Israel on Wednesday at the headquarters of Agudath Israel of America.

Ofman was one of about 200 Jews who crowded into the fervently Orthodox organization's conference room for a 1 p.m. service. Another 70 streamed in for a service an hour later.

"We're en masse fasting and pleading to God to put an end to the tragic situation," Ofman said.

Responding to simultaneous calls from Israel's chief rabbis, the fervently Orthodox Councils of Torah Sages in Israel and the United States and the centrist Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, Orthodox Jews all over the world participated in Yom Kippur Katan, or little Yom Kippur, a rarely observed service that is traditionally held the day before the new Hebrew month.

The service shares much of the liturgy of Ne'ilah, the concluding service of Yom Kippur.

Frustrated by the escalating violence in Israel, many observant Jews found solace — and hope — in the extra prayers.

"I have family in Israel and the situation has gotten really horrible," said Valerie Schwartz, 23, a computer programmer who attended the 2 p.m. Yom Kippur Katan service at Agudath Israel. "The least I can do is come and daven a little bit."

Rabbi Steven Dworken, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America, said that as American Jews, "it's up to us of course to be Israel's advocates in the United States, but it's also up to us to do what we Jews do best, and that's to hold firm to our belief in God and to pray to him that he rescue us from the situation in which we find ourselves."

As the situation in Israel has worsened, Orthodox Jews in America — from fervently Orthodox to modern — have distinguished themselves from other American Jews, both by continuing to travel to Israel in large numbers and by advocating prayer as an important way of addressing the country's problems.

Many Orthodox students go to Israel between high school and college, and enrollment in those post-high school yeshivas in Israel remains stable, according to research by the fervently Orthodox group Am Echad, as well as anecdotal reports from travel agents who work with Israeli yeshivas.

Judy Tenenbaum, owner of Plane Talk Travel in Brooklyn, a company that specializes in arrangements for yeshiva students, said her business has remained solid. Israeli yeshivas and seminaries with American students remain full, and some even have waiting lists, she said.

However, more students than usual are returning to the United States for Passover break, rather than using the time to travel in Israel, she said.

And while Orthodox Jews continue to visit family in Israel, fewer are touring or staying in hotels.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman, editor of the Brooklyn-based Artsroll, one of the largest publishing houses for Jewish religious books, said the fact that no political or military approach seems to offer a resolution of Israel's problems is spurring Orthodox Jews

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### 5 Palestinians killed in West Bank

Four Palestinians were killed Thursday when their car exploded near the West Bank town of Tulkarm. Palestinian security sources blamed the blast on Israel, which had no comment. According to Israel Radio, Israeli troops shot at the car, which was filled with explosives.

The incident took place after a leading Palestinian terrorist was killed when an Israeli helicopter fired missiles at his car.

### Minister warned on conversion

Israel's attorney general ordered the interior minister to immediately register more than 20 Reform and Conservative converts as Jews on their identity cards. Elyakim Rubinstein warned Thursday that if Interior Minister Eli Yishai did not register them, Rubinstein would inform the High Court of Justice that Yishai and his employees are in contempt of court. The ministry registered seven of the converts on Thursday.

Last month, the court ruled that the Interior Ministry must recognize Reform and Conservative conversions for the purpose of registering converts as Jews on their Israeli identity cards. On Wednesday, a Knesset committee passed new regulations abolishing the "nationality" entry from identity cards. However, the new regulations will only come into effect in another 40 days, according to the Jerusalem Post.

### Cabinet resignations take effect

The resignations of two Israeli ministers went into effect Thursday. Tourism Minister Binyamin Elon and Infrastructure Minister Avigdor Lieberman submitted their resignations after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon lifted a siege on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters. A last-minute attempt by Elon to get his colleagues in the National Unity — Israel, Our Home bloc to remain in the government failed, according to the Jerusalem Post.



## Daily News Bulletin

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toward greater prayer and introspection.

"Nobody has an answer right now," Scherman said. "So religious people feel, in a situation like this, that this forces us to turn to God."

"If you believe in God and truly believe that God runs the world, then if you need a miracle to get out of the situation, you have to be worthy of miracles," Scherman added.

Scherman said he is noticing more prayer and more efforts at self-improvement in the Orthodox world.

"A lot of people have changed in the past few months," he said. "They're becoming more observant, but not just in religious ways. They're more concerned about others, more generous, more kind."

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, who teaches Jewish law at Loyola Law School-Los Angeles, said Orthodox Jews are focusing on the news, and many are stepping up their political advocacy for Israel.

At the same time, he said, "we're pulled to do a Torah reality check that the ultimate solution, in the long term and short term, is in the hands of God."

"We have to remind ourselves that the efficacy of any of our activity depends on the way God looks at us," he said. "Divine help depends on the quality of our lives as Jews, so we have to re-examine our lives in the general sense of what our values are and where we're heading, and in the details of life."

Like Scherman, Adlerstein reports an increased focus on self-improvement in the Orthodox community.

He said there has been a growing number of lectures on how people should change their lives, and attributes a recent campaign calling for people to "diminish the lavishness of weddings" to this trend.

"The events of the last few months have been so sobering, and everyone wants to do something," Adlerstein said.

Chesky Wertman, one of those who attended the Agudath Israel service on Wednesday, said prayer is "one of the most important things we can do right now."

"We're not soldiers, we're not government officials. So we can just pray to Hashem that those who are will have the wisdom to do the proper thing," he said, using the term for God. □

## Australian Jews planning to protest on behalf of Muslim asylum seekers

By Henry Benjamin

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — During Passover, more than 500 Jewish protesters plan to march at a Melbourne refugee detention center to support asylum seekers — most of whom are Muslims.

Holding matzah instead of banners, the protesters plan to demonstrate at Melbourne's Maribymong Detention Center chanting two songs from the Haggadah: "Ha Lachma Anya," or "This is the Bread of Affliction," and "Avadim Hayinu," or "Once We Were Slaves."

There are approximately 90 refugees, including six children, in Maribymong.

Jews for Refugees was established by education consultant David Zyngier, 51, whose parents came to Australia in 1949 without documents, seeking asylum from war-torn Europe. Zyngier's mother survived the Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps. His father joined the partisans to fight the Germans.

The religion of refugees "should be of no concern. This is a humanitarian problem," Zyngier said. "Who can forget the shiploads of Jewish refugees who were turned away during World War II?"

The asylum seekers, mostly from the Middle East and Afghanistan, make their way to Australia via Indonesia, where they pay as much as \$8,000 to smugglers to transport them in rickety old boats, some of which have sunk, claiming many lives. Many asylum seekers have no papers.

They are detained for up to three years in Australia while their claims for refugee status are evaluated. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Venue picked for solidarity meet

The March 24 "We Stand With Israel" solidarity gathering will be held at the 92nd Street Y in New York. Some 50 to 100 simultaneous gatherings will be held in communities throughout North America. A live telecast from Israel is planned to feature Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and top Israeli officials, along with Israeli terror victims and American political leaders.

### French pressed on anti-Semitism

Meeting with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine in Paris, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Melchior called on France to take anti-Semitic incidents there seriously. Melchior also called on the French people to sympathize with Israelis suffering during the Palestinian intifada.

### Jewish soldiers get Pesach kits

More than 2,000 Jewish U.S. military personnel stationed around the world are receiving seder kits for Passover.

The Jewish Community Centers Association of North America has shipped kosher-for-Passover matzah, soup, gefilte fish, grape juice and Haggadahs to Jewish personnel stationed in locations all over the world.

### School honors Uzbek president

A New York Jewish day school honored the president of Uzbekistan. Be'er Hagolah Institutes — The Center for Russian Jewry, the largest American school for Jewish immigrant children from the former Soviet Union, honored President Islam Karimov on Wednesday for his support of Jewish life in Uzbekistan and for his backing of the U.S.-led war on terror.

Among those honoring Karimov at the Plaza Hotel in New York were former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Lev Leviev, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union.

### Latvian neo-Nazi paper published

A new neo-Nazi newspaper is being published in Latvia.

A branch of the Russian National Unity group is publishing the New Order newspaper, which features articles accusing Latvian Jews of inciting tension between ethnic Russians and ethnic Latvians, according to the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

### Rare Chagall paintings shown

An exhibition of rarely seen works by Chagall opened this week in Monaco.

The nearly 40 works were created in the mid-1950s, when Chagall lived in Paris.

## Czech Jews wonder what skeletons are lurking in Communist-era closet

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Jewry's ghosts from the former Communist regime are set to resurface after Czech legislators voted to lift the lid on secret police archives.

Files that will be opened include those from a notorious secret police operation code-named Spider.

During the operation, which ran in the 1950s and later in the 1970s and 1980s, Czechoslovak Jews were spied on, intimidated and in some cases forced to emigrate by officials.

The officials were particularly keen to ascertain what links the Jewish community had with Israel, a state that Moscow and her satellites regarded as an enemy.

In a sad twist of history, the Czech secret police based the operation on a list of up to 30,000 Czechoslovak Jews compiled by the Nazis during World War II.

Czech legislators voted last week on a bill opening the archives, and the legislation is expected to be signed into law by President Vaclav Havel within the next few weeks.

The move has been cautiously welcomed by senior Jewish officials, who believe the archives may yield vital information about the nature of the operation and may help to bring some of those responsible to justice.

"It will be very good to publicize what the state really did," said Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities. "But it is important to look at the whole picture rather than just a few cases."

Psychological torture and intimidation were common tactics the regime used to persuade Jews to inform on their neighbors and relatives.

State police, for instance, trained a camera on the Jewish community headquarters in Prague to monitor people's movements. Many Jews also were interrogated by the secret police.

One senior Jewish community member described to JTA how police tried to dissuade him from observing religious practices by showing him a photograph of a murdered man, implying that a similar fate awaited him.

When he chose not to cooperate, he was threatened with criminal prosecution on trumped-up charges of dealing illegally in foreign currency.

No one knows just how much information is contained in the archives of the Communist secret police — who were known as the StB — because many records were destroyed shortly before the Communist regime fell in 1989.

But many in the Czech Jewish community are concerned that a false picture may emerge, not least because some former community members are known to have collaborated with the regime, either willingly or under duress.

Sylvie Wittmann, co-founder of the Prague-based liberal Jewish community Bejt Simcha, is worried that some may be wrongly identified in the files as informers.

Her concern is based on personal experience, having discovered that she was wrongly identified as an informer in a separate list that a former dissident compiled 10 years ago.

"I don't see any reason to trust files of an organization like the StB that was based on lies," she said. "Every coin has two faces. On the one hand, we learn about people who were informing on us, but on the other, can we be sure it is true?"

Leo Pavlat, director of the Jewish Museum in Prague, said opening the StB files is a necessary step toward helping Czechs confront the country's Communist past.

"Information contained in the secret police files is important and should not be belittled," said Pavlat, who was regularly interrogated and threatened by state police during Operation Spider.

He added, however, that people should be careful not to make assumptions about people's guilt.

"I don't think I am in a position to be the judge of someone else," Pavlat said. "Everybody knows what he did or did not. There was someone in the community who I thought for a long time had collaborated with the regime, but I later came to the conclusion that I was probably mistaken."

"On the other hand, after making files available to the public, we can also expect some negative surprises." □

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

**A decade later, group unites Jews from FSU and Asia-Pacific regions**

By Daniel Nehmad

MOSCOW (JTA) — Eleven years ago, with Jews streaming out of the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Chlenov proposed creating a group that would be a political advocate for Jews in the former Soviet Union and represent them at the World Jewish Congress.

The plan was a hard sell at the time, as most international Jewish groups were more concerned with helping Jews leave the former Soviet Union than with the future of those who chose to stay in the region.

Yet Chlenov, head of the Va'ad, a Russian Jewish umbrella group, finally saw his wish fulfilled. Last week, his proposal came to fruition in modified form with the creation of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

At a two-day conference in Moscow, the congress was officially resurrected with the support of the World Jewish Congress and Jewish leaders from the Far East, the Pacific region, Australia and the former Soviet Union.

Conspicuously absent from the new congress' delegation was the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union, the largest Jewish organization in the area.

"The past 10 years were really a decade of transition," said, the secretary-general of the WJC, Avi Beker, referring to Jews in the former Soviet Union. "The event is really important because it is the first time" Jews in the region "have made an umbrella structure that will be active on the political scene."

The congress will be led by Kazakh businessman Alexander Mashkevich, 48, who will serve as the body's president. Mashkevich is co-founder of the Kazakhstan Mineral Resources Corporation, chairman of the Eurasian Bank and president of the Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan.

Mashkevich said the new congress has an important role to play in the enormous territory. Some 2.3 million Jews, active in 1,500 organizations, are estimated to live in the Euro-Asian region, most of them in the former Soviet Union.

"Until now, there hasn't been an organization that coordinated, united and formulated the goals of the entire region," he said. "There were not enough links in the chain, and we're creating these links."

He hopes the formation of the congress will allow communities to communicate more clearly with international organizations like the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the WJC.

These links to international Jewry would allow the group to develop new programs, including educational and exchange programs, those that aid victims of the Holocaust and other repression and others that monitor anti-Semitism.

Chlenov, who will serve as secretary-general for the new organization, said it also would foster dialogue and organize interfaith programs with members of the various religions in the region, specifically with Muslims in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The Jewish communities in all those countries are members of the new congress.

"We also hope very soon to establish relations with Iran and Syria," he said.

At least one Jewish activist is skeptical that the group will accomplish much.

"It's 10 years they have been talking of this Eurasian Union," said Semyon Avgustevich, a veteran Jewish activist from Moscow. "Now they are creating an empty shell without a real stuffing."

The formation of the congress appears to have resulted from two factors.

The first is Beker's interest in bringing communities from the former Soviet Union closer to the WJC to fill what he calls a "missing link" in the group's global operations.

The second factor is what Chlenov called an "impulse for unity" in the past few months in the Jewish community of Russia, which has the largest Jewish population in the area and where large Jewish groups have been publicly at odds in the past. He cited a change of leadership at the Russian Jewish Congress as one factor helping to improve relations among Russia's many Jewish groups.

"We have to be like one fist, all Jews" working together, said Aleksandr Sharovsky, vice chairman of the Jewish community of Baku, Azerbaijan.

Beker had invited Chlenov to put together a delegation to last fall's WJC assembly in Jerusalem, which was charged with electing the group's leadership. But disagreements over representation in the former Soviet Union's delegation to the WJC assembly have kept the powerful Federation of Jewish Communities out of the new body.

Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of the federation, said the federation requested that the WJC allow it to bring more than the 12 delegates allotted last fall.

According to Chlenov, who formed the delegation, there were 70 individuals in the delegation.

The WJC's Beker said he thinks the federation "got its fair share" of delegates to that assembly.

"We don't always" give more delegates "to bigger or larger groups," Beker said. "We are looking for organizations that are involved in the political life of the community as well as religious affairs."

Negotiations on the federation's membership in the congress are said to have continued up until the day before last week's founding conference.

Sources say the federation insisted either that its president, Israeli diamond mogul Lev Leviev, be given a co-leadership role with Mashkevich, or that the congress have no president. The federation also demanded that it receive half of the congress' delegates to the WJC assembly, the sources said.

The federation says Leviev's name was never an issue in the negotiations, but that it insisted that the new congress be led by two or three people — one of whom would be nominated by the federation.

Berkowitz, of the federation, also said the group is upset that closed-door negotiations were leaked to the public.

Still, both congress officials and the federation say they hope to cooperate in the future.

"We are very positive in every way in welcoming the initiative," Berkowitz said.

"Since there is so much work to be done, we hope and pray that quality partners will emerge who assist with the development and growth of the Jewish communities in the FSU."

The congress seconded his sentiments.

"We intend to work together and not exclusively so that later in the future the federation will send delegates to the congress," Mashkevich said. □

(JTA correspondents Lev Gorodetsky in Moscow and Richard Allen Greene in Baku, Azerbaijan, contributed to this report.)