



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gunman kills Israeli, wounds 10

One Israeli was killed and at least 10 wounded Sunday when a gunman fired at pedestrians in Kfar Saba.

The gunman opened fire in the center of town, near the courthouse and police station.

He was shot dead by local police officers, according to media reports.

Kfar Saba is located near the border between Israel and the West Bank.

The regional police chief said the terrorist probably arrived on foot from one of the nearby Palestinian towns. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

In other violence, Palestinian suicide bomber seriously wounded 22 Israelis when he blew himself up in Jerusalem on Sunday.

The attack occurred near a bus at a busy intersection in Jerusalem's French Hill neighborhood. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel withdraws from Bethlehem

Israel pulled its troops out of the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

Sunday's withdrawal from the center of town came after a heavy day of fighting between Israelis and Palestinians that left one Palestinian dead. The pullback also completed Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian-ruled towns in the West Bank, as requested by the Bush administration.

The Palestinians had said they wouldn't meet with Israel until the Israel Defense Force completed its pullout from Palestinian towns and cities.

Museum exhibit opens to protest

A small protest greeted the opening of a controversial Holocaust art exhibit at New York's Jewish Museum.

Approximately 75 people demonstrated Sunday at the opening of the "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery, Recent Art."

Protesters shouted such chants as "Shame on you" and "Don't go in," and a protest organizer said the exhibit "trivializes the Holocaust and demeans the suffering of its victims."

The protest included Holocaust survivors, yeshiva students and other community members. The museum says the exhibit seeks to present Nazi horrors in a thought-provoking manner.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

This year, there'll be an exodus of Israelis from the Promised Land

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It's known as the holiday of freedom, but Passover this year in Israel will likely be remembered for its sense of restriction.

With a worldwide recession in progress, and would-be tourists still wary of airline travel because of possible terrorist attacks, there will be far fewer tourists eating matzah in Israel this spring.

While some hotels are booked for the Passover holiday, which begins next week, others are expecting the worst during what is usually a peak season for the Israeli tourist industry.

"I think Americans aren't coming, and money doesn't seem to be the issue," said Zvi Lopian at Platinum Travel. "To me, it's very sad."

This is Lopian's fifth year arranging Passover week vacations at the glatt kosher Caesar Premier Resort hotel in the Dead Sea, and he only has about 172 rooms booked at \$999 per person.

Most of the guests will be Israeli, with about 20 percent coming from England.

A general manager at one of the higher-end hotels in Tel Aviv said he expected a much tougher season than in previous years.

With Tel Aviv tourism geared toward incoming traffic from abroad, all issues of marketing depend on outside factors.

"This is a period when we're trying to understand what's happening," he said. "It's hard to know with all the turmoil. People have to be calm to make reservations and that depends on the political situation."

For Israelis, Passover is usually a time for family travel, particularly those who are not observant and don't mind missing the family seder. With the kids off from school for two weeks and most companies offering half days during the holiday's four intermediate days, it's the perfect time to take a trip.

But these Israelites aren't heading back to Egypt, nor are they planning on exploring the land of milk and honey.

Clearly, Israelis aren't interested in swimming in the Red Sea like their ancestors.

Instead, they'll be driving to Ben-Gurion International Airport and taking off for primarily European destinations.

London, Paris, Holland, New York and China are all popular Passover destinations, according to El Al, Israel's national airline.

From mid-March until mid-April, El Al has 72 flights to 16 destinations. There are three additional flights each week to New York, four more to London, three to Milan and two to Amsterdam.

"They want to go places where the weather is spring-like, where they can forget their troubles," said an El Al spokesperson. "They want a great vacation."

According to Issta, a large Israeli travel agency that caters to the student segment, around 250,000 Israelis will leave Israel for Passover.

Approximately 60 percent of the outgoing traffic will be after the single seder night — some traditions can't be broken, after all — and others will go away for the entire holiday.

The average cost of a trip? Around \$800 per person, depending on the destination. Mediterranean trips to Turkey and Greece are the cheapest, followed by Europe with the U.S. costing the most per person.

For Israelis who like staying closer to home, whether for financial reasons or

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon focuses on cease-fire

Ariel Sharon told his Cabinet on Sunday that he is aiming for a cease-fire with the Palestinians.

The Israeli prime minister wants to implement the cease-fire plan first suggested by former CIA Director George Tenet last summer, Israeli media reported. He also warned that Israel would respond to any violence during cease-fire negotiations.

Meanwhile, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said a cease-fire could be imminent. "The declaration of a cease-fire can be achieved within 48 hours. The question is what will happen after a declaration of a cease-fire."

Zinni: Terror won't stop effort

Anthony Zinni said terrorist acts would not stop him from trying to establish a Middle East cease-fire.

The U.S. envoy, who is meeting with leaders in the region, made his comments after two terrorist attacks in Israel on Sunday. Zinni condemned the attacks "in the strongest possible terms" and called on the Palestinian Authority to crack down on terror.

The U.S. envoy has described his early meetings with both sides as "extremely positive."

Conversion team set up

Ariel Sharon established a special team to examine the issue of non-Orthodox conversions.

The move comes after Interior Minister Eli Yishai threatened on March 14 to pull his fervently Orthodox Shas Party out of Sharon's government unless the issue were resolved.

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled last month that the ministry must recognize Reform and Conservative conversions for the purpose of registering the converts as Jews on their national ID cards, but Yishai refused to implement the decision. After receiving a warning from the attorney general, Interior Ministry officials registered seven of the converts.

religious, few are making elaborate plans for the holiday's intermediate days.

Unlike previous years, when Israelis went to relax in the Sinai Desert or explore the Petra caves in Jordan during Passover, no one is visiting Israel's neighbors this year.

There may be peace with Egypt, the nation that figures so prominently in the Passover narrative, but it's not quiet enough on the border to venture a boat ride on the Nile.

"Pesach used to be a very popular time to go into Sinai," said a spokesman for the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, which organizes local hiking trips. "But we're not doing that right now, because no one wants to go."

Instead, the society, like other local tour companies, is focusing on tourism inside Israel.

All the tours down south to Ein Gedi, the Ramon Crater, as well as up north to the upper Galilee and Golan are almost fully booked. With the average cost of \$15 to \$30 for an adult and \$12 to \$25 for a child, depending on the length of the trip, it's a bargain, and that's good news for many Israelis right now.

Down at the Dead Sea, the 22-mineral rich waters still attract tourists, mainly Israelis, because it is far from any security threat, and Israelis can still drive there safely.

Safe roads and distance from possible trouble spots are taken very seriously these days. No one wants to run into trouble, and that has made resort areas like the Dead Sea and Eilat still popular for Israelis.

"Freedom of movement is an important factor," said Lapian. "People feel a bit safer at the Dead Sea, but they won't drive on certain roads to get here even though there haven't been any problems."

In fact, the Hyatt hotel at the Dead Sea is fully booked for Passover, with 50 percent of the guests from Europe and the rest from Israel. Many are family units that book 20 to 40 rooms and stay for the entire week.

"I think this particular segment isn't sensitive to the situation because they figure they have to celebrate Pesach anyway," Hyatt Manager Arie Aizenshtat said. "And for them, celebrating in Israel is the most important thing. There's a logic to it."

And in Jerusalem, the holy city, reservations are being made, albeit slowly, at the capital city's top hotels.

"If someone could tell me what's going to happen with peace, I could tell you what's going to happen with my bookings," said Norman Rafelson, the general manager of the David Citadel Hotel, formerly the Hilton, in Jerusalem.

As of mid-February, the five-star hotel had more than 100 bookings for 10-night stays during Passover, which put the hotel at 50 percent of its hoped-for 80 percent occupancy rate.

"I think we're prepared for a little bit less this Pesach," Rafelson said. "I thought bookings would have picked up earlier, but everyone's waiting for the last minute."

For now, Israelis will be celebrating the holiday of freedom, of spring and of matzahs in destinations far and wide. And next year? Maybe in Jerusalem. □

Israeli tourists unwelcome

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A French guesthouse refused to accept reservations from a couple because they are Israeli.

"This is the only way we found to express our opposition to Israeli policy," Cecile Muselet, keeper of the Bastide De La Fave hotel in Provence, told Israel's Y-net Web site.

Many local hoteliers refuse to accept Israelis but give other excuses publicly, she said. Muselet claimed she does not have anything against Jews generally, and compared the action to a boycott declared on South Africa a few years ago.

"We don't wish to invite Israelis, it won't help anyone around here," she said.

The incident is "reflective of an environment in France that is increasingly hostile to Jews under the guise of criticism of Israel," the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, said. "The continuing failure of the French government to speak out about anti-Semitism and attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions is a signal to the French people that such behavior is acceptable."

Some French Jews say their government has reacted with nonchalance to a surge in anti-Semitic attacks since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Billy Graham apologizes again

The Rev. Billy Graham apologized again for anti-Semitic remarks he made 30 years ago in a meeting with President Nixon.

In recently released tapes, both Graham and Nixon said Jews dominate the media, among other things.

"I cannot imagine what caused me to make those comments, which I totally repudiate," Graham said in a statement released last Friday. "Whatever the reason, I was wrong for not disagreeing with the president, and I sincerely apologize to anyone I have offended."

Graham had earlier issued a brief apology for the statements, but had not acknowledged making them.

FBI tracking Hamas

The FBI says it is moving closer to building criminal cases against financial supporters of Hamas in the United States.

The agency is investigating how the group has diverted millions of dollars from the United States to fund its terrorist activities against Israel.

Officials said the investigation is complicated because Hamas uses a network of U.S.-based Muslim charities that also engage in legitimate humanitarian efforts, such as helping Palestinians in refugee camps.

Arafat, Sharon get thumbs down

A majority of Americans believe that neither Yasser Arafat nor Ariel Sharon has done enough to promote Middle East peace, according to a new poll.

Eighty percent of respondents to the Time magazine poll said the Palestinian Authority president has not done enough for peace.

Sixty-eight percent said the same about the Israeli prime minister.

Some 54 percent of respondents said the Bush administration is doing enough to promote peace.

Students' trip to Israel canceled

Some 50 Jewish teen-agers will not be visiting Israel this year as part of an annual tour that includes visits to concentration camps in Europe.

The decision by the MetroWest, N.J., federation regarding next month's March of the Living was made because of safety considerations, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Instead of going to Israel, the New Jersey students will most likely have a three-day seminar in New York, where they will learn about Israel and tour historic sites.

It is not clear whether the other 1,400 high school students on the March of the Living trip will be visiting Israel.

Serbian prime minister pledges support for synagogue restoration

By Ruth E. Gruber

SUBOTICA, Yugoslavia (JTA) — Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic visited Subotica's historic synagogue this week and pledged government support for efforts to restore the run-down structure as a symbol of tolerance and multiculturalism.

"This building is so beautiful," he said Sunday, following a performance by Jewish pupils inside the dilapidated sanctuary.

"I look forward to coming back here for the inauguration ceremony when the restoration work is complete," he said.

The visit was Djindjic's first to a Jewish community since he became prime minister.

Accompanied by Serbia's Religion Minister Voja Milovanovic, he met with leaders of the 225-member community and with members of the board of a new foundation aimed at restoring and reviving the synagogue.

Djindjic pledged government assistance in obtaining the detailed plans, blueprints and cost evaluations needed before restoration work could commence.

"It means that there will be state participation in the project, and that is important," said the Jewish community's vice president, Mira Poljakovic.

Subotica is on Serbia's border with Hungary. Its population includes ethnic Serbs, Hungarians, Croats and others, and Hungarian is widely spoken.

Before the Holocaust, the town was home to about 6,000 Jews, almost all of whom were deported to Auschwitz in 1944.

Built in 1902, the synagogue is considered one of Europe's finest examples of art nouveau architecture, featuring ornate decoration based on Hungarian folk motifs.

Though owned today by the city, it is part of a complex of buildings that otherwise are still owned and used by the small but active local Jewish community.

The new synagogue restoration foundation, called SOS Synagogue, includes Jewish representatives as well as local political figures.

It is headed by Jozsef Kasza, a former mayor of Subotica who is currently a deputy prime minister of Serbia.

The restored synagogue is to have both a memorial and a cultural function. Like Djindjic, organizers hope the synagogue will be seen as a symbol of both Jewish history and the town's multicultural identity in a country slowly recovering from the war, dictatorship and ethnic strife of the 1990s.

Djindjic's visit coincided with celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the Subotica Jewish Women's Association. The anniversary celebration culminated Saturday night with a gala ceremony in the ornate city hall — a building designed by the same Jewish architects who designed the synagogue.

Guests of honor included Princess Katarina, the wife of Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia, and June Jacobs, the outgoing president of the International Council of Jewish Women.

Jacobs said she hopes Djindjic's high-profile support for the synagogue restoration would help the project come to fruition.

"I've always felt that we should get as much help as possible to fulfill the dream of the Jewish community for this incredible building to be used and enjoyed by all citizens of Subotica and hopefully visitors from abroad," she said.

"It will have many potential uses that can help strengthen Jewish identity and Jewish culture, and also enable Jewish young people to understand and love their history," she said. □

Old-timers, skinheads unite

NEW YORK (JTA) — A small group of pensioners and skinheads met in Bratislava on March 14 to commemorate the establishment of the Nazi-sponsored Slovak state during World War II.

Established in 1939, the Nazi-sponsored state was disbanded in 1945. President Jozef Tiso later was executed as a war criminal. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Canadian columnists, Jews urge country to get off Mideast fence

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — With the U.N. Commission on Human Rights opening this week in Geneva, Israel is looking to Canada for crucial support usually provided by the United States, which lost its seat on the 53-member body last year.

In short, the Israelis hope that Canada will call for a vote on a series of one-sided anti-Israel resolutions that might otherwise pass by consensus without dissent or debate.

As Israeli diplomats respectfully request Ottawa to tilt its usually "balanced" view of Middle Eastern affairs, Canadian Jews and others have become increasingly forceful in urging their government to abandon the even-handed strategy that it has employed for decades.

The Jewish community's growing dissatisfaction with the government's careful neutrality between Israel and the Arab world became obvious earlier this month at a series of events in Ottawa during a visit by Israeli President Moshe Katsav.

According to many observers, Ottawa seemed to be playing a game of bad cop, good cop as Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham and Prime Minister Jean Chretien, respectively, roasted and toasted Israel just hours apart at a luncheon and dinner hosted by the Jewish community's Canada-Israel Committee.

In his first major address on foreign policy, the foreign affairs minister harshly criticized Israel for killing innocent civilians in its struggle against Palestinian terrorism.

"Innocent civilian casualties, no matter their background or religion, are not justifiable and ultimately compromise Israel's image as a vital and compassionate nation as well as ultimately undermine the hopes of Palestinians," Graham said, eliciting obvious displeasure from the largely Jewish audience.

He also condemned "senseless attacks" of recent days without making any distinction between Palestinian terrorist attacks on crowded discotheques, restaurants and buses, and Israeli reprisals targeting Palestinian terrorists.

Hearing the boos, hisses and occasional jeers of his audience, Graham dropped sections of his prepared text, which further criticized Israel for its "demolition of civilian housing" and "incursions into refugee camps."

Even so, several people walked out of the room in disgust.

By contrast, Chretien offered firm sympathy and support for "a safe and secure" Israel at a dinner attended by about 1,500 people, mostly from various Jewish communities across the country. The guest list included senators, jurists, Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament.

"There is nothing in our experience that can capture the fear that Israelis now live with — every hour of the day, where allowing your children to go to a pizza parlor or a disco or just to play in the park can be a choice between life and death," Chretien said.

The prime minister urged Israelis to re-engage in peace talks with the Palestinians, and called upon Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to rein in extremist groups that "use the territory under his authority for safe harbor."

Keith Landy, national president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, praised the prime minister as the person "who best articulates Canadian foreign policy" and said the Foreign Affairs Ministry "needs to play catch-up."

"What the foreign minister failed to recognize in his comment about killing innocent civilians is that Israel is going into refugee camps not to kill innocent men, women and children but to ferret out bomb factories and track down terrorists."

Landy said the foreign minister's speech reflected the so-called balanced approach that the Department of Foreign Affairs has utilized for decades, but did not reflect the current situation in the Middle East or the world.

"What it failed to do is recognize a shift in world thinking," he said. "There is a real irony today that Canada is at war fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, and yet the Foreign Ministry fails to recognize that Israel is engaged in the same war."

Graham's harsh criticisms of Israel came "as a shock, as a disappointment, even at times as an insult" to the Jewish community, said Frank Dimant, B'nai Brith Canada's executive vice president.

"I think the audience felt, justifiably, that he didn't differentiate clearly enough between acts of terrorism as perpetuated by Arafat and his forces, and the kinds of measures that the Israelis have to take to protect their citizens and ensure security for the people of Israel," he said.

"If the audience wasn't so well-mannered and polite, and wasn't acting so typically Canadian, they would have walked out of that room."

Not even the prime minister's speech a few hours later could neutralize the bad feelings generated by the foreign minister's talk, said Rochelle Wilner, B'nai Brith Canada's national president.

"Although Chretien's statements were positive, he gave us no assurances that Canada's foreign policy would change, and no indication that Canada's votes at the United Nations would be pro-Israel from here on in."

In a talk the next day, Katsav praised Canada's generally friendly relations with Israel and said the two nations were like "brothers."

But he told reporters that Canada's foreign minister had made a "serious mistake" by condemning Israel for the killing of innocents.

"No one around the world has any right to condemn if we would use our right to defend ourselves. Self defense is an elementary right and we must do it," he said.

He also emphasized that Israel does not seek an escalation of the violence.

"Palestinian civilians are not our targets. Unfortunately, from time to time, there are some accidents and we try to avoid it. But they are not our targets."

Numerous Canadian newspaper columnists have called upon Ottawa to show more support for Israel as it faces what political affairs columnist Marcus Gee, writing in *The Globe and Mail* on Saturday, called "the most intense and sustained terrorist assault that any modern nation has endured."

Robert Fulford, writing in the rival *National Post* on the same day, described Canada's usual attitude in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a "plague-on-both-your-houses" stance.

"But if it's the Canadian way it's also short-sighted and immoral," he wrote, urging the government to become "a firm supporter and, if necessary, an ally" of Israel.

A poll published in the *Globe and Mail* on March 16 indicated that 16 percent of Canadians tend to support Israel in the current conflict, while 12 percent support the Palestinians, 17 percent support both sides, 48 percent support neither side and 6 percent said they didn't know. □