



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli forces mass near Gaza

Israeli forces massed Thursday near the Gaza Strip.

The move came as Israel's Security Cabinet approved action against "terrorist targets" in retaliation for a deadly Palestinian suicide bombing Tuesday night in Rishon le-Zion.

Cabinet members did not say what type of response they authorized.

But a strike against Gaza was widely expected following reports that the terrorist who carried out the bombing came from Gaza.

Bush: I don't want Arafat out

President Bush denied a report that he wants to sideline Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. Speaking to reporters Thursday, Bush reiterated that he has been disappointed with Arafat, but again called on Arafat to crack down on terrorism.

On Wednesday, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz cited an Israeli source as saying the White House wants to turn Arafat into a figurehead and have someone else take on the day-to-day duties of the Palestinian leadership.

Jewish group downsizes

The United Jewish Communities is laying off staff and closing regional offices to "redesign" and optimize the federation system, officials told JTA.

The umbrella group for North American federations will cut 38 percent of its field operations by laying off 16 employees in its regional offices, closing its Chicago and South Florida offices and housing its New Jersey office in its Manhattan headquarters, the officials added.

The move is part of an overall plan to cut UJC's budget this year from \$50.3 million to \$42.5 million, brought on by lean economic times and the UJC's ongoing effort to convert its field staff to teams of consultants.

Report: Bethlehem deal reached

A deal has been reached to end the standoff at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, an Israeli official said.

Under the deal, several countries would take some of the 13 Palestinians accused by Israel of carrying out terrorist actions, the official told The Associated Press on Thursday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Daunting for all Israelis, intifada is particularly confusing for Ethiopians

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Once a month, Zion Gatahon gathers his parents, brothers, aunts and uncles for a family meeting, and updates them about the security situation.

Gatahon was the first of his family to arrive in Israel from Ethiopia in 1984, and has become the de facto spokesman, aide and jack-of-all-trades for the extended family.

He also is what is known in Hebrew as a megasher, a professional mediator, between Ethiopian immigrants and Israeli society for Fidel, an association that works to integrate Ethiopian immigrants.

"I'm the only one who can calm them down," said Gatahon, referring to his family's fears regarding the ongoing crisis with the Palestinians. "We meet, I explain what's going on, that we're in Israel, our home that we longed for."

The 19-month Palestinian intifada is just one more complicated issue for the Ethiopian community to understand.

The older generation has had a particularly difficult time learning Hebrew, as well as the ins and outs of Israeli society. Their children become the family representatives, shepherding their parents through the health care clinic, bank, school system and job market.

Some 62,000 Ethiopians have immigrated to Israel. Many came from the countryside, where they farmed their own land and sent their children to the village school.

Their journey to Israel was long and arduous, often taking them from the village through the city of Gondar and on to the capital of Addis Ababa, where they boarded planes to Israel.

Once they landed, the government placed the Ethiopians in temporary housing, later transferring families to absorption centers and finally — hopefully — to their own, private apartments.

"Six times they move," said Gatahon, jabbing his finger in the air to demonstrate the points of transit. "And every time, it's new people, new schools and new jobs."

As a result, unemployment is high, financial sources slim — and the acclimation to Israeli society has been difficult.

Now, like all other Israelis, the Ethiopian immigrants have to deal with suicide bombing attacks and drive-by shootings, as well as the precautions that one learns to take during these uncertain times.

"I tell them to open their eyes, to keep track of their kids' hours, to know where their kids are supposed to be," Gatahon said. "But they don't get it. They think it can't happen to them."

Tragedy has already struck the Ethiopian community, more than once.

Maharatu Tagana, 85, an Ethiopian immigrant living in Upper Nazareth, was killed in a suicide bombing attack on a bus in March. The bus driver, suspicious of a passenger who had gotten on the bus, yelled at the other passengers to get off. Tagana didn't understand Hebrew, and was the only one killed in the blast.

When an Ethiopian soldier committed suicide recently while serving in the Gaza Strip, it didn't make the Israeli newspapers. Even if it had, many Ethiopians wouldn't have heard about it, because many don't read Hebrew.

"They have to hear about it on the street to know and understand what's going on," explained social worker Negist Mengesha, executive director of Fidel. "They need to hear it in their language. So they take what they hear, a sentence here and there, and

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan to probe Jenin operation

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan plans to compile a report on Israel's military operation last month in the Jenin refugee camp.

The move follows a request earlier this week by the U.N. General Assembly, Annan's spokesman said Wednesday. Annan will seek Israeli cooperation in preparing the report, he added. Annan canceled a U.N. fact-finding mission that was to visit the camp after the United Nations and Israel could not come to terms on the team's makeup and mandate.

P.A.: 16 Hamas members arrested

Palestinian police said they arrested 16 Hamas members in the Gaza Strip. Thursday's arrests came after the United States called on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to crack down on terrorists.

In the past, Palestinian police temporarily detained Hamas leaders, but released them soon after. In some cases, it appeared the Palestinians took the moves largely to protect Hamas members from possible Israeli attack. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Thursday that the United States hoped those arrested remained jailed as proof of "good government."

Posters call for attacks on Arabs

An extremist Jewish group claimed responsibility for launching anti-Arab attacks during the past 18 months. Posters signed by a group calling itself the Jewish Underground have appeared recently in West Bank settlements, Army Radio reported.

The posters contain an admission by the group that it killed eight Arabs during the intifada and planted pipe bombs last March in the yard of an Arab school in eastern Jerusalem.

The posters also called on the public to join in the underground operations against Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel, saying "their time has come."



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interpret it for themselves." If they had information in Amharic, the main Ethiopian language, the immigrants could talk to their children about what's happening. Instead, the children must tell their parents.

There are newspapers for the Russian-, Arabic- and English-speaking communities in Israel, but none in Amharic — and there is only one hour-and-a-half radio broadcast in Amharic every day. There is also a 25-minute Amharic television program each Friday.

This in a society where many Israelis listen to radio news updates every hour, and can choose from dozens of news Web sites, newspapers and television news programs.

"This is a population that has nothing to reach for to explain the situation," Mengesha said.

"Even if they have a television, if they don't speak Hebrew, they don't understand anything."

She added: "If immigrants don't have information, that's a serious problem."

Programs like Fidel and Gamla, a mentoring program funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, are spending much more of their time teaching staff and volunteers how to offer support.

Fidel, which hires the Ethiopian mediators, has held training sessions for the staff, bringing in psychologists to talk about the various aspects of dealing with terror.

The mediators explain the diverse aspects of the present situation to their clients, ranging from what it means when a son is called for reserve duty to calming children's fears about getting on buses.

"There are terms in Hebrew that don't exist in Amharic," Mengesha said. "There is no word for 'pigua,' " the term for a suicide bombing or other terrorist attack.

Fidel recently established an emergency hotline to help Ethiopian immigrants deal with uncertainty brought about by the security situation.

The hotline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide information and counseling in Amharic.

At Gamla, volunteers who started out as tutors helping with students' homework have become support networks for entire families. They start out helping with math problems and end up showing parents how to fix a window or deal with clerks at the Interior Ministry.

It's a constantly expanding relationship, explained Miri Gur, Gamla's director and founder.

The tutors also can explain political and security developments.

"They can calm them down," Gur said. "If a father says his child is scared and is wetting his bed, our volunteers can tell them who to go to for help."

The Gamla volunteer is the family's connection to the larger community.

"That's what many Ethiopians need, the 'right address' they can turn to for answers," Gatahon said.

A resident of Ofra, a Jewish settlement near Ramallah that has been on the front line of attacks for the last 19 months, Gatahon also serves on a neighborhood committee that tells people how to respond to terror attacks, particularly when a terrorist tries to invade a house.

"Even those who came here a long time ago are shocked to realize that this could happen here, in Israel," he said. "And when you explain it in their words, in their language, it's even scarier."

Despite a situation that sometimes threatens to overwhelm them, the Ethiopian community wouldn't think of picking up and leaving Israel.

"No one says, 'Why are we here, why did we come?'" Gatahon said. "This is the State of Israel. This is their final home." □

London sheik to go on trial

LONDON (JTA) — About 100 people demonstrated in London to show their support for a radical Muslim cleric accused of urging his followers to kill Jews and Hindus.

Thursday's demonstration took place as Sheik Abdullah Faisal, 38, made a brief appearance at London's Old Bailey court.

A trial date will be set on June 7. □

JEWISH WORLD

French leader: Don't boycott

Now is not the time for a boycott of French products, a French Jewish leader said.

Roger Cukierman made the comment Wednesday during a briefing in New York sponsored by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Some U.S. Jews have called for a boycott, charging the French government is not doing enough to combat a recent spate of anti-Semitic incidents in France.

"We believe this attitude would be counterproductive," said Cukierman, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations. "We do hope that with the election of the new government" in France, "things will be taken much more seriously in the future. We believe, at last, that we will see some improvement."

900,000 rallied for Israel

About 900,000 people participated in pro-Israel rallies last month.

The rallies were held in 94 cities around the world as Israeli forces conducted a massive anti-terror operation in the West Bank, according to the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Sallai Meridor.

In addition, Meridor said this week, hundreds of Jewish leaders from around the world came to Israel recently on solidarity missions.

Jewish leader blasts Swiss

The leader of Swiss Jewry attacked his government for its "one-sided statements" favoring the Palestinians. "The Swiss government has criticized Israel's war on terrorism," Alfred Donath said Thursday at the annual meeting of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland. "This attitude only serves to support the already high levels of anti-Semitism" in Switzerland, he added.

Israel backer wins campus vote

A pro-Israel Jew was elected student body president at the University of California's Berkeley campus. Sophomore Jesse Gabriel's victory came amid growing anti-Semitic sentiment on campus.

The results come as good news to many Jewish students, who have felt targeted by anti-Semitic hostility linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

High court justice tours Israel

A trip to Israel heightened a U.S. Supreme Court justice's appreciation for the Jewish state. Addressing the American Jewish Committee's annual meeting Wednesday, Stephen Breyer said he was struck by the beauty and diversity of the country, but noted a "sadness" there. Breyer visited Israel as a guest of Israeli Supreme Court President Aharon Barak.

Orthodox institutions back efforts to help 'chained' women

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — An international grass-roots organization has won the backing of major Orthodox rabbis and organizations around the world to help ease the plight of women whose husbands refuse them a Jewish divorce.

Jews who live according to halachah, or Jewish law, require a get to dissolve their marriages.

Only a man can give a get, and some husbands withhold them out of vindictiveness or to extort financial or custody settlements from their wives.

The issue has long rankled many in the Orthodox world because of the impact on women, some of whom are trying to escape abusive relationships.

Women denied gets are forbidden from remarrying or even dating, and are called agunot, which means "chained women."

The new developments, the result of advocacy by the Brooklyn-based L'maan B'nos Yisrael International, include the expansion of standards for batei din, or rabbinical courts, to prevent recalcitrant husbands from using certain loopholes to avoid granting their wives divorces, according to Marilyn "Mattie" Klein, the group's president and founder.

The standards have been endorsed by several rabbinical courts and Orthodox organizations, including one of Israel's two chief rabbis, Yisrael Meir Lau; the Rabbinical Council of America; the Orthodox Union; Yeshiva University President Rabbi Norman Lamm; and England's chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks.

Lau has called on all rabbinical courts in Israel to cooperate and recognize only those rabbinical courts outside Israel that accept the above standards, Klein said.

In addition, the Rabbinical Courts of the State of Israel have agreed to keep records of all Orthodox divorce certificates given by rabbinical courts in the United States, she said.

Such a registry will serve as a backup in case the certificates are lost.

Since those records will only be kept for rabbinical courts approved by Israel's Rabbinical Courts, it will encourage people to use respected, established courts that adhere to the standards.

One of the biggest loopholes that has been used recently to block women from obtaining gets is the heter me'ah rabbonim, which literally means "exception of 100 rabbis." Under the heter, a man who obtains 100 signatures from rabbis can withhold a get from his wife, but still remarry.

Initially intended to be used when a wife is incapacitated, the practice has been widely abused in recent years, Klein said.

"There are people who are selling heter meah rabbonim, and women who are not being given the right of getting this get," Klein said.

People have been known to obtain the signatures by going to yeshivas in Israel, where no one knows the parties involved in the divorce, and misleading young rabbis into believing the heter is justified. "The bottom line is they're keeping a wife chained as an agunah while freeing the husband," Klein said.

At a recent Brooklyn conference that attracted approximately 400 people, some of them agunot or former agunot, the new steps, as well as other new initiatives, were announced.

L'maan B'nos Yisrael International announced that it is creating an information center to help women seeking a divorce by gathering and distributing information about which batei din, or rabbinical courts, have been helpful to women and which have not.

"It's like the Better Business Bureau," Klein told JTA.

"Otherwise people go to a Beis Din," or rabbinical court, "with less information and thought than they do when buying a wedding gown," she said.

People go to the courts with "eyes closed and their lives are turned upside down."

The group is also launching a petition drive in support of the rabbinical court standards, asking people to have their rabbis, community leaders and community members to sign on or explain why they do not.

"People have to take a stand," Klein said. □

With situation in Israel tense, many Russians are staying put

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — After fleeing the tense Caucasus Mountains region, Ilya and Taira Shubayev planned to immigrate to Israel.

But the couple, both in their 40s, are planning to stay here for now because of the violence in Israel. They worry that their son, 16, and daughter, 14, would be endangered by serving in the army.

The Shubayev family is not alone. Immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union is down 50 percent this year.

Approximately 5,200 new immigrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union in the first four months of this year, a drop of nearly 50 percent from the same period in 2001 — and the 2001 figures were down 40 percent to 50 percent from previous years, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The improving economic situation in Russia and Ukraine, where the majority of Jews in the former Soviet Union live, plays a role. Most emigration from Ukraine and Russia today is coming from small towns, where the economic recovery has not been as strong.

Alexander Faytelson, 38, a Jewish businessman from Ukraine, canceled his planned aliyah after a monthlong visit to Israel earlier this year. He decided to settle in Moscow instead.

"I simply wouldn't find a good job in Israel, in today's situation, and for that matter, in Germany. In Moscow my chances are greater," he said.

Faytelson's elder brother moved to Boston a few years ago, and his parents left Lviv, Ukraine, for Germany last March. But Vladimir Shapiro, a sociologist with the Russian Academy of Sciences, told JTA that the main factor behind the decline in aliyah is the tense situation in Israel.

"In addition to simple fear, there is a new widespread psychological phenomenon that stops a lot of people — the absence of a light at the end of the tunnel, of the futility of the peace process," Shapiro said.

A 1998 survey that his group conducted showed that 45 percent of Russian and Ukrainian Jews said Israel was a more secure place for them than Russia or Ukraine, while only 5 percent to 7 percent thought the reverse.

"Today, the most probable result would be exactly the opposite," Shapiro said.

Other experts cite additional factors. Roman Spektor, vice-president of the Va'ad umbrella group of Russian Jews, told JTA that one factor behind lower emigration to Israel is the "depletion of the aliyah reservoir" from the former Soviet Union.

Almost 1 million Jews from the former Soviet Union moved to Israel between 1989 and 2001.

An estimated 10 percent of them have returned — and the return flow has intensified recently.

While emigration to Israel is decreasing, the number of Jews moving from the former Soviet Union to Germany increases each year.

The former Soviet Union still provides the main source of new immigrants to Israel, giving 60 percent to 65 percent of the total aliyah figures. Of the 737 new immigrants who arrived in Israel last week, 480 were from the former Soviet Union, according to the Jewish Agency.

For many, Russia seems like the better option right now.

"I was stunned to find out that the Israeli on an El Al flight to Moscow was a guy in his 30s returning to no other place than Kazan, which never seemed to me a decent place to live," said Marc Obukhovsky, 55, a Moscow-based sales manager.

Obukhovsky himself left for Israel in 1991, but later returned. He now shuttles between Moscow and Jerusalem, where part of his family lives. □

Pro-Israel activism thwarts action against Israeli medical association

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a major victory for pro-Israel groups, a resolution to expel the Israel Medical Association from the World Medical Association was thwarted last week.

The expected resolution, which blamed Israeli doctors for not opposing Israel's recent military operation, was initiated by Denmark and expected to be introduced by one of the Scandinavian member countries of the 14-nation executive body of the association at its annual spring conference held in Geneva.

The WMA — a nongovernmental organization based in a French town outside Geneva that works closely with the United Nations, but operates as an independent consortium of national medical associations — had denied knowledge of any motion to expel the Israel Medical Association. On its Web site, it called the subject a "hoax" that elicited 20,000 e-mails.

Instead there was a "proposed resolution on the assurance of medical and health services during the armed conflict between Israelis and Palestinians," said WMA spokesman Nigel Duncan.

That discussion on the Middle East is the reason the IMA, which is not a council member, was invited to the conference, according to Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Hearing rumors about the hostile resolution, the IMA came armed with a position paper condemning suicide bombings and calling for humanitarian access to all victims.

When the IMA arrived, the group was assured by the Scandinavian countries that no such resolution would be introduced, said IMA's secretary-general Leah Wapner, who credits her group's lobbying efforts along with Hadassah, B'nai B'rith and the Simon Wiesenthal Center for preventing the potential pitfall.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center linked its Web site to the WMA's to encourage e-mails of protest.

B'nai B'rith members lobbied their own medical associations in their respective countries, particularly in Latin America and Europe.

And Hadassah had its members advocate on behalf of congressional letters asking the WMA to prevent the politicization of the conference and to reject a resolution to expel the IMA.

Hadassah also worked with the American Medical Association. In the end, the WMA passed a "very balanced" resolution on the Middle East, said Wapner, which denounced terrorism and the use of hospitals and ambulances as a target or cover for any hostile activity.

It was based on the IMA's position paper, said Amy Goldstein, director of Israel, Zionist and international affairs for Hadassah. And there was even a resolution commending the IMA for its position paper, she said. □