



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

6 nations to take in Palestinians

Six European nations agreed to take in 13 Palestinians sent into exile after being holed up in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Belgium each agreed to take in some of the 13 during a meeting that took place Monday of E.U. foreign ministers in Brussels.

The 13 are now being held in Cyprus, after being deported from Bethlehem under a deal that ended a five-week standoff at the church.

Israeli officials say the 13 have been responsible for attacks on Israeli civilians and said they may seek their extradition.

Arafat tours West Bank

Yasser Arafat angered some Palestinians when he skipped a visit to the Jenin refugee camp. On Monday, the Palestinian Authority president left Ramallah for the first time since Israeli forces withdrew from positions around his headquarters earlier this month.

He traveled aboard a Jordanian helicopter to several West Bank cities, including Bethlehem, where he toured the Church of the Nativity arm in arm with Christian clerics.

Aides said he skipped a tour of Jenin's refugee camp because he feared being heckled, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Court bars graduation prayers

The American Jewish Congress hailed a U.S. court's decision on Monday to ban prayer at a high school graduation ceremony.

The group had called the decision by an Iowa school board to include the Lord's Prayer at graduations a "crude invasion of the right to be free of state-sponsored religion."

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1992 that organized prayers at public school graduation ceremonies are unconstitutional even if the prayers are voluntary and nondenominational.

The law surrounding prayer at school functions is not entirely settled, however, as the high court last year banned student-led prayers at high school football games.

But the court declined to take up a case this year that dealt with student prayer at graduations.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

New group of rabbinical students supports Israel, but remains critical

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — A few weeks ago, as the North American Jewish community was mobilizing rapidly for the Israel solidarity rally in Washington, Jill Jacobs and several classmates were debating whether to attend.

"On the one hand, we wanted to go because here was this united Jewish communal support for Israel, but on the other hand, we didn't necessarily all support the policies of the current Israeli government," said Jacobs, a fourth-year rabbinical student at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary.

A group of students from several seminaries conferred by e-mail and decided to attend the rally — but to bring a banner and flyers expressing their concerns about Israel's recent military actions in the West Bank.

That quickly snowballed into a new group with representation from all the major streams of Judaism, called Rabbinical Students for a Just Peace.

Composed of 108 students from seven rabbinical seminaries, the group emphasizes its love for Israel.

But it also criticizes Israel's recent military retaliations against Palestinian terrorism.

The members of the group call for American-brokered peace negotiations and urge the Jewish community to refrain from "inflammatory" rhetoric, such as calling Israel's Jewish critics "traitors" or comparing Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to Hitler.

Members hail from JTS; the University of Judaism, which also is Conservative; the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, a small liberal Orthodox seminary; the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College; the Academy of Jewish Religion, which is nondenominational; and the Aleph Alliance, which is part of the Jewish Renewal movement.

The group has sent a letter to 20 major American Jewish leaders. They hope to develop a curriculum to teach about Israel in a way that is more "nuanced" than "the straight Zionist history," said Jacobs.

The letter emphasizes the members' love of Israel and their condemnation of terrorism, but notes, "We cannot ignore the suffering that Israel has caused the Palestinian people during the 35-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

A recent news release expressed "particular horror" at Israel's Operation Protective Wall last month.

JTS student Melissa Weintraub criticized the Israeli army for "systematically destroying the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority."

The group is generating mixed reactions in the seminaries and among Jewish leaders, although — with the seminaries consumed with final exams — word about it has yet to spread far.

Two JTS rabbinical students responded to an e-mail the group circulated, disagreeing with many of the group's assertions.

"I found the context in which this plea was made rather troubling," one of the students wrote, noting that the group's "language implicitly denies" that "the party primarily responsible for the Palestinians' plight is not Israel, but rather the corrupt, oppressive and terrorist Palestinian regime."

Jacobs said the group reflects something of a shift among American rabbis, with the future generation of rabbis more willing to criticize Israel and support the idea of

MIDEAST FOCUS

Anti-Israel resolution averted

Motions against Israel didn't reach a vote at the U.N. Special Session on Children last week. One resolution condemning Israel's treatment of children and another maneuver to remove Israel's credentials to represent the West Bank and Gaza Strip fell through as a result of lobbying by Israel, Jewish groups and U.S. support, according to Jewish leaders.

But countries also are realizing that the focus on Palestinians is "taking away from their own agenda," said Dina Siegel Vann, director of U.N. and Latin American affairs for B'nai B'rith International.

Palestinian attacks army base

An armed Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli soldiers Monday after he hurled a hand grenade at guards at an army training base. A second Palestinian gunman escaped following the Jordan Valley attack.

The Al-Aksa Brigades, the military arm of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, claimed responsibility in a call to The Associated Press. The group, which has been responsible for numerous terror attacks on Israeli civilians, says it has three more gunmen ready to strike.

In another incident Monday, Israeli border police killed a Palestinian who opened fire on troops at a roadblock near Bethlehem.

Palestinian: Israelis bombed hall

Israeli officials vehemently denied an accusation by the head of Palestinian intelligence that last week's suicide bombing in Rishon le-Zion was carried out by Israeli criminals.

The claim by Amin Hindi is "baseless," said Dore Gold, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. After the May 7 attack, which killed 15 Israelis and injured 60 others, Hamas claimed responsibility, saying it was in retaliation for Israeli military operations in the West Bank.



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a Palestinian state. "We don't have the same kind of fantasy-land view of Israel" as previous generations, Jacobs said. Perhaps, she said, it's because most of today's students grew up after Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Six-Day War, and many have lived in Israel.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, received the group's letter.

He would like to "engage in a dialogue" with the students, in the hope that "we can help them to better understand the issues," Hoenlein told JTA.

"None of us are indifferent to some of the concerns they raised" about the suffering of Palestinians, "but the question is where the responsibility lies and how you address those concerns," Hoenlein said.

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said the group's perspective is not novel among American Jews and Israelis.

Still, he added, the letter's "timing is probably off."

"It's not wrong to keep reminding us of the need to be sensitive, to be caring, to be honest in our relations with other people, namely with the Palestinians and other Arabs," Meyers said.

"I'm just not sure one needs a whole new organization to do this at this moment," when much of the world is quick to "indict Israel" and appears to be holding Israel to a far higher moral standard than other countries, Meyers said.

The president of HUC, Rabbi David Ellenson, said he doesn't agree with all the group's views.

Israel has the right to defend itself, he said, "and the wisdom of Prime Minister Sharon's policy at this point strikes me as self-evident."

However, he emphasized, the students should not be viewed as treasonous.

"It seems to me what they offer is a balance in how the Jewish community ought to react to any events transpiring now," he said.

RRC President Rabbi David Teutsch said the "best news" about the new group is that "it demonstrates the capacity of a younger generation of rabbis for creating coalitions that transcend the movement boundaries in Jewish life."

"That bodes well for the capacity of the Jewish community to pull together in facing the challenges of the moment, as well as the future," he said.

The students' views are shared by many Reconstructionist Jews, Teutsch said, though many in the movement may "strongly disagree" with their letter.

Teutsch said the letter "represents a respectable point of view," though he takes issue with some of the language.

"My choice is generally for more moderate and modest language, just because I think it's easier for people in a political and moral debate to hear that kind of language," he said.

The letter "had the kind of rough edges that a letter written relatively quickly can easily have."

Ellenson, Meyers and Teutsch acknowledged that the new group may reflect something of a generational shift.

Younger American Jews tend to be more individualistic and less focused on peoplehood, Ellenson and Meyers said — and they also have never known a world in which Israel didn't exist.

Meyers speculated that the difference is mainly between students still in school and rabbis who have experience working in the field.

"There are different perspectives brought from within the ivory tower as students and from within the communal settings, where one works with diverse populations of people and one has the perspective of additional years and life experiences," Meyers said.

Rachel Goldenberg, a fourth-year rabbinical student at HUC who is involved with the new group, said it is important for students to speak up, since they may become future leaders of the American Jewish community.

"One of the reasons why I believe in this group is that we're pushing for a voice in the mainstream Jewish community," she said.

"We're hoping that this voice for peace and compassion for both sides is not a marginal voice." □

JEWISH WORLD

U.N. group linked to terror

A U.S. lawmaker accused the United Nations Relief and Works Agency of being "complicit in terrorism." In a letter Monday to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) said UNRWA has not worked to prevent terrorist activities while maintaining humanitarian projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Lantos, ranking minority member of the House International Relations Committee, says UNRWA refugee camps are hotbeds of terrorist activities. The United States Agency for International Development provides aid to UNRWA as part of its annual disbursement of funds for the West Bank and Gaza.

Ex-Jewish hospital vandalized

An unused, pre-World War II Jewish hospital in Berlin was vandalized. In an incident believed to have taken place Saturday, windows, lamps, safes, furniture and historical material in the 97-year-old building were destroyed.

Police have not determined the motive, but Jewish leaders said they have no doubt that it was an anti-Semitic attack.

Jewish Agency opens institute

The Jewish Agency for Israel is opening a think tank. The Policy Planning Institute for the Jewish People, which opens its doors Tuesday in Jerusalem, "will examine the challenges, threats, needs and opportunities" confronting Jews worldwide, the Jewish Agency said.

Vienna Shoah memorial sought

The son of two Austrian Jews killed by the Nazis hopes to build a Holocaust memorial in Vienna. The memorial proposed by Kurt Yakov Tutter, who lives in Canada, would list the names of the more than 60,000 Austrian Jews killed in the Holocaust.

It would be erected on the site of a former train station that served as a deportation site for 50,000 Jews. The memorial would be in addition to another memorial and museum being planned for downtown Vienna.

Think tank unveils Mideast center

The Brookings Institution opened a Middle East research center. The Saban Center was launched Monday with a speech by Jordan's King Abdullah.

It will be directed by Martin Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. The center's funding comes from Haim Saban, an entertainment mogul who moved from Israel to Los Angeles, and its focus is expected to be on the construction of a Palestinian state, lessons of the U.S. initiative in 2000 at Camp David and the future of Iraq and Iran.

Controversy surrounds debate on Germany's national identity

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — A controversy has erupted in Germany over Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's decision to discuss Germany's national identity with a writer who once said it was time to stop using the Holocaust to criticize Germany.

Before the public discussion was held on May 8 — the 57th anniversary of Nazi Germany's surrender to the Allies — the Central Council of Jews in Germany said it was "irritated and bewildered" by Schroeder's decision to conduct the discussion with writer Martin Walser.

Jewish leaders remained unhappy after the event was held.

"The composition, program and conduct of the discussion confirmed our doubts and fears," Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council, told the Berliner Zeitung newspaper the day after.

Jewish officials also were irked by the choice of moderator — journalist Christoph Dieckmann, who wrote last year in Die Zeit newspaper that "Israel's arrogant belief in its chosenness is a curse."

The presence of Walser and Dieckmann was a combination "that I find extremely provocative, worrying and counterproductive," Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council, said in a radio interview on the day of the event.

Members of the Berlin Association Against Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism, which called on Schroeder's Social Democratic Party to cancel the event, said before the event that if the chancellor planned to declare Germany "a normal nation," then May 8 would mark "liberation from German responsibility" instead of liberation from the Nazis.

On the evening of the event, some 200 protesters gathered near the headquarters of the Social Democrats, carrying banners with messages such as "No Forgiveness, No Forgetting."

"I can't understand how the chancellor of the Democratic Republic of Germany could have a dialogue with a man like Walser, who wants to make things normal that can't be normal," said Victoria Dolburd, head of Germany's Jewish Student Association. "There's a difference between feeling guilty and being aware of what happened."

"I think it's strange, to say the least, that Chancellor Schroeder is seeking this dialogue with two people who play very, very deliberately with classic anti-Semitic subtexts," said Jeremiah Riemer, an American scholar of European politics currently living in Berlin.

Dieckmann introduced the debate by saying, "There are no anti-Semites or nationalists on this podium."

Acknowledging the protests, he apologized for his line about Israel in last year's article. "I did write that, and it was dumb and untrue, and I have regretted it ever since," the journalist said.

The discussion between Schroeder and Walser ultimately revealed how difficult it still is for Germany to define itself — even more than 50 years after World War II ended.

Though the generation involved with or affected by the Nazi era is rapidly fading, the discussion showed that Germany's struggle to come to terms with its past is very much alive.

Schroeder said some of Germany's greatest patriots were those who "resisted the murderous Nazi regime." He tried to define modern Germany in terms of its role within Europe, its reintegration of the former East and West Germans, and its self-definition in terms of values rather than place.

Walser described national identity as a feeling that to a large extent defies rational definition.

He also suggested that, without the heavy reparation demands on Germany after World War I, there would have been no Hitler.

Without Hitler, the argument goes, there would have been no Auschwitz. The theory of indirect Allied responsibility for Nazi war crimes is a common theme of conservative historians in Germany. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Arrest of settlers with explosives sparks fear of Jewish underground***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) – Almost 20 years after Israel was shaken by the exposure of a Jewish underground in the West Bank, some fear that another one could be emerging.

In the past few days, police detained four Jews from settlements in the Hebron Hills region suspected of conspiring to plant a booby-trapped cart in a Palestinian girls school in Jerusalem.

If the incident does prove to be part of a larger movement, it could complicate a tentative opening toward peacemaking, and also undercut public support for the embattled settlement movement.

The first Jewish underground was exposed as a result of thorough intelligence work by the General Security Service inside the “hard core” of the Jewish settlement movement in the West Bank.

In contrast, the latest alleged plot was detected by chance, when police encountered a vehicle they thought was acting strangely. Security forces reportedly had no prior knowledge of any Jewish terrorist plot.

Several days ago, a regular police patrol spotted a van, of a type frequently used by the settlers as security vehicles, stopping near the Palestinian Al-Mukassid Hospital.

The passengers tried to detach a cart laden with explosives from the car. It reportedly was set to explode at 7:35 a.m., when the street would be humming with girls on their way to a nearby school.

Police detained Shlomo Dvir (Seliger), 27, of the Bat Ayin Bet settlement in the Hebron Hills; Yarden Morag, 25, of Bat Ayin; Ofer Gamliel, 42, also of Bat Ayin; and Yosef Ben-Baruch, 23, of the Maon Farm, also near Hebron.

The four are suspected of plotting to carry out a terrorist attack.

The suspects denied the charges, and said they were framed and tortured by their investigators.

A Jerusalem court extended their remand.

It was the first time since the intifada began in September 2000 that security forces have laid their hands on Jews suspected of plotting terror attacks against Palestinians.

Had the incident occurred in a vacuum, it might have been overlooked as a marginal event.

However, there are increasing signs of renewed Jewish vigilantism in the West Bank.

Eight school students and a school attendant were wounded last March in an explosion in the eastern Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Baher.

An unknown organization calling itself “The Revenge of the Infants” claimed responsibility for the attack, apparently in revenge for a Palestinian terrorist attack in the fervently Orthodox Beit Yisrael neighborhood of Jerusalem.

Seven Palestinians have been killed in suspected terror attacks against Palestinians in the past two years, and 10 have been wounded.

None of those cases has been cracked, but police now are checking whether the four settlers from the Hebron region are associated with the previous attacks.

The settlement establishment was shocked by the arrests.

Yesha, a group representing Jewish settlers, issued a statement sharply condemning the alleged plot.

Although no charges have been pressed, Yesha issued a statement saying that “such acts are faulty and negative from every possible aspect, both legally and morally.”

The settlement establishment has good reason to be nervous.

One of the byproducts of the intifada has been greater Israeli public identification with the settlements.

Many Israelis now believe that the Palestinians are not fighting the settlements as much as they are fighting the Jewish state itself, with the settlers taking the brunt of the Palestinian attacks on the front lines.

The re-emergence of Jewish vigilantism in the territories could cause heavy damage to sympathy for the settlement cause.

When the Jewish underground was exposed in the 1980s, Yisrael Harel, then Yesha’s chairman, was one of its most outspoken critics — although some underground members were among his best friends.

However, Harel told JTA this week that he doubts the four men detained in the incident at the girls school had done anything similar to the subversive activities by members of the 1980s underground.

“I do not have any inside information,” said Harel, a resident of Ofra in the West Bank, “but I suspect that even if these people are guilty, they represent only themselves.”

Some of the settlers in the Hebron region are “freaks,” Harel said, but they usually express their peculiarity through music, relatively free use of drugs and sex and an inclination to work in nature, for example by grazing herds in the traditional biblical style.

Most Hebron Hills residents have not shown any exceptional militancy against the Palestinians, Harel said.

That, of course, is a matter of political perception. Legislator Yossi Sarid, the head of the Meretz Party, said after the arrest that the incident could be another example of the “weeds of terrorism” growing in the settlements.

Jibril Rajoub, head of the Palestinian Preventive Security Service, questioned recently why Israeli security forces were so effective at nabbing Palestinian terrorists, but were unable to expose Jewish ones.

The answer, of course, is that thousands of Palestinians are engaged in violence, as compared with a handful of Jewish militants.

“Jewish terrorism is marginal compared to other things which have happened during the intifada,” said Ehud Sprinzak, dean of the School of Government at the Interdisciplinary Academic Center in Herzliya and an expert on Jewish terrorism.

“I suppose that had there been a serious Jewish underground,” the security forces “would have invested more” resources in dealing with it, he said.

Even if the detainees represent only themselves, they do reflect a current among Jewish settlers.

In the past year and a half, public figures in the territories, among them influential rabbis, have spoken of revenge as a means of deterrence — particularly when they feel the government isn’t doing enough to prevent attacks.

That was the rationale behind militant attacks such as the burning of Palestinian fields, vandalism against Palestinian cars, and frequent acts of provocation by Jewish residents of Hebron against their Arab neighbors. □