



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Envoy, Arafat discuss reforms

A U.S. envoy discussed reforming the Palestinian Authority with Yasser Arafat.

Meeting with William Burns, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, Arafat discussed new laws being passed to streamline the Palestinian security infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During the talks Thursday in the West Bank, Arafat also discussed the possibility of new Palestinian elections, a State Department official said.

Burns was slated to meet Friday with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Couple helped bomber

A Palestinian man and his Jewish wife were arrested for allegedly helping a suicide bomber. According to details released for publication Thursday, the couple confessed to driving the bomber who carried out the May 22 attack in Rishon le-Zion. The wife, Marina Pinski, immigrated to Israel from Russia 11 years ago.

As a result of information provided in the couple's confessions, Israeli soldiers on Wednesday arrested a Palestinian woman near Bethlehem who was allegedly going to participate in the Rishon le-Zion bombing. The attack was to be a double suicide attack, but the woman changed her mind, the army said.

Israeli forces also arrested a second Palestinian woman who had changed her mind before carrying out a suicide attack in Jerusalem.

Jenin allegations challenged

U.S. Jewish leaders gave U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan a report countering allegations that Israel committed war crimes during its operation in the Jenin refugee camp.

The 150-page report, submitted to Annan by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, includes scores of accounts by doctors, soldiers and others who witnessed first-hand the Israeli operation in the camp.

In a related development, the Anti-Defamation League issued a separate report that details how international organizations, nongovernmental agencies, foreign governments and the media prematurely attacked Israel for committing atrocities in the refugee camp in April.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

With Israel increasingly isolated, Christian right shows strong support

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With Israel under fire, at least one interest group is remaining steadfast in its support for the Jewish state — the Christian right.

The Christian right's affinity for Israel isn't new, but it has taken on fresh prominence as Jews feel isolated in the face of increased global support for the Palestinian intifada.

Jewish groups now are more likely to publicly acknowledge the evangelicals' support, showing their appreciation and, perhaps, hoping that other religious groups might follow their lead. Just how much things have changed is illustrated by the Anti-Defamation League's relationship with the Christian right.

In 1994 the ADL published a report called "The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America." The report acknowledged the religious right's support for Israel, but put the ADL and the Christian right on a collision course.

Now the ADL is running an ad that includes an Op-Ed by former Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed, entitled "We People of Faith Stand Firmly With Israel."

In his piece, Reed explains that the Christian right's support of Israel stems from a humanitarian impulse to help and protect Jews, a shared strategic interest in democracy in the Middle East and a spiritual connection to Israel.

The relationship between the Jewish and evangelical communities has changed "dramatically," said Reed, who now is chairman of Georgia's Republican Party. As little as five years ago, it would have been "unthinkable" for the ADL to use his work in an ad, he said.

For Reed, the Christian right's support for Israel could usher in a new phase in Jewish-Christian relations. "Now is an historic opportunity to use this moment of crisis and threat to Israel for greater dialogue and understanding," he told JTA.

It's too early to tell whether others will agree with Reed.

Many issues — mainly church-state questions such as prayer in public schools — continue to divide Jews and evangelicals. But the sides now seem more willing to set their differences aside in trying to help the Jewish state.

"The differences will continue," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "That doesn't mean we should reject their support."

Jews should be grateful for the support, Foxman said — especially since the Christian right isn't demanding any quid pro quo.

On some level, the new alliance may be viewed as just another form of coalition politics. Jews have worked with evangelicals before on religious freedom issues, while disagreeing on other points.

And one group, Toward Tradition, has been focused for years on shared issues between conservative Jews and Christians.

On its Web site, the group, which is headed by a rabbi, calls for American Jews to recognize "Israel's best friend" — the conservative Christian community.

The group's Web site is towardtradition.org.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs is pleased with the support from the Christian right, says Reva Price, the group's Washington representative.

"But is that going to change our position on school prayer? No," she said.

On the local level, there also is a careful acceptance and appreciation of the

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. team arrives in Israel

U.S. defense officials arrived in Israel on Thursday for strategic talks with Israeli officials.

According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, the officials will discuss topics including joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing, and research and development projects; regional issues, including threats posed by Iran and Iraq; and a briefing on Indian-Pakistani tensions.

Four Palestinians arrested

Israeli soldiers arrested four wanted Hamas members in Hebron. The troops withdrew from Hebron early Thursday after making the arrests. Israeli security forces continued to operate around Tulkarm and Kalkilya. Six Palestinians were detained in the Tulkarm area.

Israeli troops pulled out of Bethlehem on Thursday after searching there for suspected terrorists since Monday.

Shas to return to coalition

Israel's fervently Orthodox Shas Party is rejoining the government. On Wednesday, Shas leader Eli Yishai signed an agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon paving the way for the party's return.

Under the agreement, Shas will support the government's emergency economic bill when it comes before the Knesset for final approval next week. In exchange, Sharon will consider Shas' demands for modifying the austerity package, which the party claims hurts the weaker segments of society.

Poll: Israeli youths know victims

More than one-third of Israeli youths know someone killed or wounded in a recent Palestinian terrorist attack, according to a poll. The study on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's impact on youths found that 56 percent go less often to public places.

evangelical support. "I think it's called pragmatism," said Judy Hellman, special projects coordinator for the Jewish Community Relations Board/American Jewish Committee in Kansas City.

The community has not compromised its principles and recognizes that there still are great differences between the groups, she said.

"But we can't ignore the reality that these people are standing up for us," she said.

In San Antonio, Jews and evangelical Christians had not worked together before, but at a recent Israel solidarity rally church members made up half of the crowd, said Judy Lackritz, community relations director for the Jewish federation.

Jews have never felt entirely comfortable about support from evangelical churches, questioning the Christians' motivation and worrying that the support was offered only because the Christians wanted to convert Jews.

Within the Jewish community, debate about the Christian right's motivation is continuing — alongside the burgeoning friendship.

At the San Antonio rally, for example, people heard from one church minister who said Israel shouldn't give up any of its land, and denounced Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat as a terrorist.

But the crowd also heard from another minister who said, "Eventually we will all be in Jerusalem as brides of Christ."

Christian groups dismiss the conversion issue and deny they have an underlying agenda.

"It doesn't really figure into this," said Michael Brown, national church liaison for the Christian Coalition of America. "We have an appreciation for the Jew and a love of Jewish heritage."

But some Jews see conversion as a major issue for evangelical Christians. There are some who feel that what the evangelicals really want is to meet three preconditions in the Bible and Christian theology for the coming of the Messiah: The State of Israel must be restored, Jerusalem must be in Jewish hands and the Temple must be rebuilt.

Reed believes that evangelical support for Israel has little to do with eschatology, and describes the fear about conversion as a "caricature and bogeyman" to scare Jews from cooperating with his community.

"The only thing that divides Jews and Christians from working together is fear and suspicion," Reed said.

Brown said his group generally has received cooperation and a warm welcome when it reaches out to the Jewish community. The group's annual conference in October will include a rally in Washington of Jews and Christians in support of Israel.

Evangelical groups and churches have been donating money to Jewish federations for years, though the umbrella United Jewish Communities has no hard figures available. For example, an evangelical church in Pensacola, Fla., plans to donate \$100,000 to the UJC's Israel Emergency Campaign this week, UJC officials said.

Embracing the Christian right has been smoother for Israeli officials. At a recent event where evangelical leaders gathered in New York for Jerusalem Day, Israel's consul general described the special relationship between the evangelical community and Israel. "It is a relationship that has not been twisted or dictated by politics or interests," Alon Pinkas said, but is based on "a very pure and moral bond. We are very thankful for the commitment of the evangelical Christian community, especially in this time of crisis."

With evangelicals enjoying something of a political comeback after several lean years, the mixing of politics and religion by some congressional leaders sometimes unnerves the Jewish community.

In a recent speech at a Baptist church, the U.S. House of Representatives' majority whip, Tom DeLay (R-Texas), who has been outspoken in support of Israel, said, "Only Christianity offers a comprehensive worldview that covers all areas of life and thought."

"Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities that we find in this world — only Christianity," DeLay said, according to The Washington Post.

The National Jewish Democratic Council charged that the speech denigrated minority religious beliefs.

"His exclusionist, fundamentalist Christian worldview that he gave voice to in his speech is indicative of why the American Jewish community will always be uncomfortable with Christian conservative leaders, regardless of their strong support for Israel," said David Harris, NJDC's deputy executive director. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Jihad speech sparks protest

A planned Harvard commencement speech by a Muslim student has sparked an online protest.

Nearly 2,000 people have signed an online petition protesting the speech, "Of Faith and Citizenship: My American Jihad," which student Zayed Yasin plans to deliver at the school's June 6 graduation ceremonies. Yasin, the former president of the Harvard Islamic Society, said the content of the speech is not political and he has no plans to change it, according to The Associated Press.

Harvard President Lawrence Summers defended Yasin's selection to speak at commencement, saying "Especially in a university setting, it is important for people to keep open minds."

New home for Shoah museum

Detroit's Holocaust museum is moving to a larger space designed to provoke an emotional reaction.

A tower outside a former theater in the Detroit suburb of Farmington Hills, Mich., will resemble the smoke stacks of a Nazi death camp crematorium, and walls will be textured to look as if they are wrapped in barbed wire. Construction on the building is slated to begin in June, with the move expected in September 2003. The city's Holocaust museum was previously housed in a Detroit-area JCC.

German politician apologizes

A German politician apologized for disparaging a Jewish leader. Earlier this month, the vice president of the Free Democratic Party, Jurgen Mollemann, caused a stir when he charged that the "hateful style" of Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is partly responsible for growing German anti-Semitism. On Wednesday, Mollemann published a letter to the head of Germany's Jewish community, Paul Spiegel, acknowledging that the remark was a mistake.

Australia pressed to nab suspects

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Australia to start proceedings against 22 Lithuanians suspected of Nazi war crimes. Australia "remains the only Western country" that has "failed to take successful legal action against" the "large numbers of Nazi war criminals and collaborators" who fled to Australia after World War II, according to the group.

Kazakh shul under construction

Construction began on a synagogue in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan. The cornerstone placed at the May 28 ceremony came from a site near the Western Wall, according to Yeshaya Kogen, the chief rabbi of Kazakhstan.

The building is slated to be finished next year.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Despite rally, Israel's friends face an uphill battle in Europe

By Toby Axelrod

BRUSSELS (JTA) — "Incredible."

Only a few hours to go before Wednesday's pro-Israel demonstration here begins and already a disinformation campaign is under way, says a furious Joel Rubinfeld.

"Incredible," he repeats, his phone in one hand, cigarette in the other.

A local merchants association has circulated an "urgent communique" warning that thousands of "extreme right-wing" demonstrators will be coming through.

"It has been confirmed that certain acts of violence could result," reads the letter, which was faxed to 60 local businesses.

"Madame Bertram, why are we described by you as extreme right?" asks Rubinfeld, 33, a founder of the new Belgian-Israel Friendship Association, which helped coordinate the march.

Rubinfeld isn't expecting extremists: The marchers will be Jews from across Europe, most of them liberal.

Jeannine Bertram, who signed the urgent letter, is apologetic but indignant. First she blames police for issuing a vague warning. Then she says she was referring only to possible counterdemonstrators, though the letter doesn't mention this.

Finally she agrees to send a clarification to those who received her first letter.

"This is a rally to support Israel and peace," Rubinfeld says, stubbing out another cigarette.

Rubinfeld's encounter ends politely, with "madame" and "monsieur." But the scene is emblematic of the frustration that supporters of Israel face in Europe today.

"It drives me crazy," says Frederique Ries, a member of the European Parliament who supported the demonstration. "It is disinformation. One plus one plus one makes a lie. And it's always in the same direction."

The march, which drew nearly 10,000 people to the home base of the European Union, was peaceful and colorful. Participants from across Europe, from Greece to Great Britain, waved Israeli flags and the banners of their home countries. Umbrellas opened for a while, but ultimately the sun broke through.

Rubinfeld became involved in pro-Israel activism last year. It began when he wrote a letter of complaint to a local TV station and copied it to about 100 friends. That mailing list turned into a forum for discussion on media coverage of the Mideast, which now has nearly 2,000 participants.

"I was always very Zionist and very involved in Judaism and Israel," Rubinfeld says. He and his wife, Maryll, have a daughter and live in a suburb of Brussels.

His sister and her family, his grandmother and numerous aunts, uncles and cousins live in Israel.

"People have become accustomed to a kind of anti-Zionism that has become, in Belgium at least, a kind of anti-Semitism," Rubinfeld says. "When people ask me, 'Why are you so involved — would you do the same for Belgium?' I answer, 'Don't ask me to choose between my mother and my father.'"

Rubinfeld's letter to the TV station related to a demonstration of some 250 people in front of the European Commission building. A local TV news reported that there had been 30 protesters.

"I wrote to the chief of the station, 'I am used to disinformation, but today I was there. I am not in the West Bank when you are reporting, I am not in Israel. But this time I was a direct witness.'"

"We are sorry," the station responded, "We didn't know. When we came there were only 30."

The response to his mailing list convinced Rubinfeld that it was time to do more. He and several friends founded "Belisrael.be," the Belgian Friends of Israel organization — www.belisrael.be.

"I am now working almost 90 percent of my time for Israel," Rubinfeld says, adding that his private advertising agency has suffered. "I cannot work as much. It is a pity, but there are not enough people today doing this, and I made this choice." □

Jewish groups and U.S. lawmakers seek review of U.N. refugee agency

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the Israeli army re-entered Jenin this week to arrest terrorist leaders, several Jewish groups and U.S. lawmakers are scrutinizing the link between the United Nations and the refugee camp.

The United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency administers educational, social and health services to Palestinian refugee camps, including the one in Jenin.

Jenin was home to one-third of the Palestinian suicide bombers who have launched attacks against Israel, prompting Israel's initial military operation there.

That operation, part of Israel's Operation Protective Wall, uncovered arms caches, suicide belts and an explosive factory in the camp. It also prompted many Jewish and political leaders to ask why the U.N. agency didn't know about or put a stop to the terrorist activity.

U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) are trying to answer that question with letters to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, calling for an investigation into UNRWA. And Lantos, the ranking Democrat on the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee, helped organize a hearing last week by his committee on the subject.

That hearing "confirmed many of Mr. Lantos' fears," said his spokesman Matt Gobush.

UNRWA's "responses during the briefing raised more questions than it answered in our minds about UNRWA's role at the camps and their failure to prevent terrorist activity from taking place," he said.

Rebecca Needler, spokeswoman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, said, "The flurry of activity on the Hill and within the Jewish community surrounding these camps, and the ease with which terrorists move freely within them, have called into question if there's something the United States can do about it."

Jewish organizations such as AIPAC, the World Jewish Congress and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations are asking how the U.N. agency can plead ignorance of terrorist activity. They are also asking why the United States funds more than one-quarter of its budget — the U.S. contribution amounts to nearly \$90 million a year.

Jewish groups say they have not yet formulated a strategy beyond starting to press these questions.

But Avi Beker, secretary-general of the WJC, has a few goals in mind. He is focusing on what he describes as UNRWA's inherently faulty mandate, and is advocating some sort of international review.

UNRWA's mandate was renewed in December for three more years, a customary renewal since the agency's 1949 founding to aid Palestinian refugees.

Unlike the U.N. High Commission on Refugees, which is charged to seek "durable solutions" for all of the world's refugees, UNRWA is the only U.N. organization dedicated to one group of refugees — the Palestinians.

Beker takes issue with its mandate to provide humanitarian assistance, rather than be involved with efforts to resettle and rehabilitate the refugees. UNRWA's mandate perpetuates the "real

human tragedy of the Palestinians," said Beker, noting that the controversy surrounding Israel's operation in Jenin was the catalyst for his interest.

Israel suffered widespread criticism of its operation in Jenin, with many quick to conclude that a "massacre" had occurred, a view now widely disproved as Palestinian propaganda.

At the same time, there was no international discussion over the Jenin-sponsored violence that prompted Israel's operation, Beker said.

Beker is also working to review U.S. funding for the agency through meetings between the State Department and members of Congress. He approached Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, who, in turn, arranged a meeting with Beker and 10 other members of Congress two weeks ago.

Last week, Lantos wrote a letter to Annan, indicting UNRWA as an organization "complicit in terrorism."

Citing Annan's own 1998 report to the U.N. Security Council that refugee camps be "kept free of any military presence or equipment, including arms and ammunition" and that "the neutrality of the camps" be maintained, Lantos said UNRWA's failure to prevent and report terrorist activity links the agency "directly or indirectly" to terrorism.

Annan's spokesman said the secretary-general was in the process of crafting a response. But Karen AbuZayd, UNRWA's deputy commissioner who was in Washington last week to brief the House International Relations Committee and the National Press Club, said her agency had "no knowledge at all" of the Palestinian terror operation.

Like most Palestinians who live in the camps, people don't know of those activities unless they are directly involved, she told JTA.

She said UNRWA is made up mostly of Palestinian staff, and the group fosters "peace" and "understanding."

AbuZayd said her agency contributed to stability in the region, and that its efforts were often stymied by Israeli checkpoints.

AbuZayd said UNRWA uses extra-curricular activities involving drama, dance and art along with U.S.-supported textbooks to teach conflict resolution.

But AbuZayd's peaceful characterization of her agency is not shared by Israel.

"UNRWA is a body that is politicized to the bone," said an Israeli official. "Instead of taking care of the Palestinian refugees, it just stagnates their situation. Moreover, in camps that are run by UNRWA, there is a flourishing network of terrorism."

The agency "finds time to criticize Israel time and again, but when it comes to the Palestinian terrorism network, it is as silent as a lamb." □

Israel champion dies at 96

NEW YORK (JTA) — Alfred Fleishman, a P.R. executive who helped publicize the plight of hundreds of thousands of displaced Jews after World War II, died Tuesday at 96.

Traveling to Germany in October 1945, Fleishman was an eyewitness to the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Sent to Germany by the American Jewish Congress as a special consultant to the U.S. secretary of defense, he wrote a report that alerted many organizations in the United States to the plight of displaced Jews. His experiences led him to become a champion of the new State of Israel □