



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 132

Tuesday, July 16, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Report: Arabs to present plan

Arab leaders are reportedly planning to present a plan calling for international recognition of a Palestinian state.

The plan will be presented as officials from the United States, Russia, the European Union and United Nations meet this week in New York in an attempt to revive Israeli-Palestinian talks. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are also expected to take part in the talks.

Yeshiva bill sparks threat

Fervently Orthodox lawmakers threatened to bolt the Israeli government over a bill granting draft exemptions for yeshiva students. The lawmakers took issue with a provision in the bill requiring yeshiva students to serve 12 days a year in the Civil Guard.

Meanwhile, the secular Shinui and Meretz parties threatened to submit no-confidence motions in the government, charging that the bill institutionalizes draft-dodging.

Turkish chief rabbi dies

The chief rabbi of Turkey, David Asseo, died at 88 on Sunday night. A native of Istanbul, Asseo was a longtime leader of the Turkish Jewish community, which now numbers an estimated 20,000.

Before he became chief rabbi, Asseo was director of the Turkish rabbinical seminary in Haskoy and the rabbi of the Haydarpasa congregation outside of Istanbul. He is survived by two daughters and two grandsons.

Candidate out of Mass. race

A Jewish candidate dropped out of the race for governor of Massachusetts.

Steve Grossman, a former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said his polling numbers were not good enough and he did not think he could win the November election.

Another Jewish candidate, former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, remains in the running for the Democratic nomination in September.

Because of Tisha B'Av, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, July 19.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Rabbis' threat to sue FBI reflects widespread outrage

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — A group of rabbis is threatening to sue the FBI unless it calls the shooting at Los Angeles International Airport a terrorist act.

Although mainstream Jewish groups are distancing themselves from such a move — the head of the Anti-Defamation League called it “absurd” — the sentiment of the suit reflects widespread Jewish outrage over the FBI’s reluctance to brand the incident a terrorist act.

On July 4, an Egyptian national, Hesham Mohamed Hadayet, fired at El Al’s ticket counter at LAX, murdering two and injuring three before being killed by El Al security officials.

The FBI’s failure to call it a terrorist act “violates” its own guidelines on defining terror, Rabbi Avi Weiss of New York told reporters atop the steps to the FBI’s headquarters in Manhattan last week.

It also follows an FBI pattern to avoid labeling terrorist acts as such for political reasons and puts American lives at risk in the war on terror, said Weiss, the national president of Amcha — The Coalition for Jewish Concerns. He said a lawsuit by Amcha rabbis against the FBI could be filed within the next two weeks.

The lawsuit could be based on the grounds that the FBI failed to protect U.S. citizens, Amcha officials said. A self-proclaimed “nonestablishment” group, Amcha has often been out front of more mainstream Jewish organizations with its activist — and some say extremist — approach.

While Israel was quick to call the act terrorism, the FBI is waiting until there is “clear evidence indicating motive or until the investigation is concluded” before labeling the incident, said Matt McLaughlin, an FBI spokesman in Los Angeles.

The FBI’s position has not changed despite increased Jewish pressure since the incident occurred.

The FBI employs the definition of terror devised by the Code of Federal Regulations, which characterizes it as the “unlawful use of force and violence” to further “social or political objectives,” according to Cheryl Mimura, an FBI spokeswoman in L.A.

“Duh!” said Weiss, repeating and pointing to the headline of the lead editorial in the national Jewish weekly, the Forward, that day.

“Enough dithering. What happened at Los Angeles International Airport July 4 is not a tough call. Not unless you don’t want to know the answer,” its editors charged.

In addition to widespread denunciation in the Jewish media, the New York Post also carried an editorial attacking the FBI’s stance.

“Law enforcement should not jump to conclusions, but this head-in-the-clouds approach is ridiculous,” wrote analyst Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, a Philadelphia-based think tank.

Echoing the words of Jewish activists, Pipes called the case reminiscent of past FBI missteps.

In one example, he cites the 1994 Brooklyn Bridge shooting of a van full of Chasidic boys by a Lebanese taxi driver that resulted in the death of 16-year old Ari Halberstam. The FBI called it “road rage” until in 2000, after years of lobbying by the victim’s mother, the bureau reclassified the attack as terrorism.

“These expressions of denial obstruct effective counterterrorism,” Pipes wrote.

Had the FBI begun investigating previous terror attacks as such, America might be

MIDEAST FOCUS

Deri released on parole

The former leader of Israel's fervently Orthodox Shas Party was freed from prison. Aryeh Deri was freed Monday after serving two years of a three-year sentence for accepting bribes and misappropriating state funds. Deri said upon his release that he would fight to clear his name.

When granting him early release, a parole board ruled that he cannot enter politics for one year.

Jobless Gazans demonstrate

Unemployed Palestinians demonstrated near U.N. offices in the Gaza Strip on Monday demanding international assistance. During a similar demonstration last month, protesters called on the Palestinian Authority to pay them unemployment benefits.

According to local reports, the Palestinian Authority paid about \$150 in one-time payments to unemployed workers in a bid to stem the protests.

Arafat denies siphoning funds

Yasser Arafat denied an Israeli newspaper report that he has transferred tens of millions of dollars overseas.

Palestinian attorney Asama Sa'adi sent a letter to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot demanding it print a retraction of allegations that Arafat and his deputy Abu Mazen had siphoned off funds in case they are forced into exile, reports said. The paper said the allegations were part of an official Israeli document recently presented to U.S. officials.

Minister offered London post

Israeli Trade Minister Dalia Itzik has reportedly been offered the post of ambassador to Britain. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres made the offer, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would support it.

The paper said Itzik would likely accept the posting.



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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better equipped in fighting the war on terror, Weiss said.

Classifying the case as terrorism would raise the level of the investigation, Weiss said.

For example, El Sayyad Nosair, the man convicted for killing Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1990, was later found to have ties to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Because the murder was investigated as a homicide, Arab documents containing information about that plot went untranslated until after the bombing, according to Amcha.

When the FBI says they can't find a motive, "excuse me, but what planet do they live on?" asked Patrick Clawson, deputy director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Its failure to conduct the investigation as a suspected terrorist incident — which could then be downgraded — raises questions about how seriously the FBI is investigating the case, said Clawson.

For Jewish organizational leaders, the July 4 shooting at El Al was surely terrorism. And they are anxious for the FBI to see it as such.

It "has all the ingredients of what I consider" terrorism, said Shula Bahat, associate executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

"Infused with hate toward a specific people," Hadayet had the ideology of terror, borne out of an Egyptian culture which breeds a "vicious anti-Semitism," Bahat said.

For its part, the AJCommittee will continue to press the FBI on this case, as it did with the Halberstam case, she said.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said the shooting was "clearly an act of terror."

And the FBI's "reluctance to use that labeling is troubling," he said.

But more critical than characterizing the incident is why the FBI has not yet produced answers in its investigation, he said.

"The longer this goes on, the more questions it raises," he said.

According to Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, the FBI's failure to label the act terror is "even more baffling" than in previous cases, given America's current war on terror.

"I don't think it's politics," said Foxman, who said he contacted the FBI director last week and is waiting for a response.

Still, he said, the Amcha lawsuit is "equally" as "absurd" as the FBI's inaction.

The FBI is "not an enemy," but an "ally," Foxman said.

"This is a disagreement in a technical definition. For any element of the Jewish community to sue is disproportionate and absurd," he said, echoing the views of others in the community. □

New security at Prague Jewish sites

PRAGUE (JTA) — Extensive security measures are being introduced to protect prominent Jewish sites here against possible terrorist attacks.

As part of the measures, as many as six security cameras are to be installed as soon as possible near official Jewish buildings.

Traffic restrictions and protective barriers will also be introduced at sensitive locations around the city's Jewish Quarter.

In addition, concrete pillars will be erected on sidewalks outside some buildings, including Prague's Jewish Museum, in order to prevent any vehicles from getting too close.

Prague police said patrols have already been stepped up around Jewish locations as an extra precaution.

The steps were announced by the Czech Interior Ministry on the instructions of the country's National Security Council.

Officials stressed, however, that there is no evidence of specific threats against Jewish targets in the Czech Republic.

"These are preventative measures," said a spokesperson for the Czech Interior Ministry.

Czech Jewish leaders welcomed the moves, but they said it had taken years to persuade authorities to take action. □

JEWISH WORLD

Pearl abductors sentenced

A Pakistani court convicted four Islamic terrorists in the kidnap-slaying of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl.

In a videotape released earlier this year, Pearl affirmed his Jewish heritage before being executed by his abductors. On Monday, the British-born kidnap mastermind, Sheikh Omar, was sentenced to death. His three accomplices were given life sentences.

Omar issued a statement through his lawyer threatening anyone who tries to carry out the sentence. "I will see whether who wants to kill me will first kill me or get himself killed," his statement said.

Farrakhan ban upheld

Britain's highest court upheld a ruling barring Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan from entering the country. Three officials representing the House of Lords published a ruling Monday that Farrakhan should not be permitted any further appeals to overturn the ban. They gave no reasons for their decision.

The ruling came after Britain's Court of Appeal upheld the ban in April, ruling that Farrakhan's "notorious opinions" were a threat to public order.

Polish Jews partake in Birthright

Twenty-one Jewish students from Poland are visiting Israel as part of the Birthright Israel program.

The 10-day visit marks the first time that students from Poland are participating in the program, organizers said. The program enables Jewish young adults from around the world to have a free educational visit to Israel. The tour was made possible by the Jewish Agency for Israel's Education Department and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Wartime pope 'tried' in Italy

A mock trial in Italy of the wartime pope resulted in a hung jury. Long accused of fostering the Holocaust by remaining silent about it, Pope Pius XII was "tried" over the weekend as part of events at the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto.

The festival this year included a series of three mock trials of historic cases, carried out in a theater by prominent legal personalities, with the theater audience acting as jury. After hearing detailed evidence about the pope from both sides, the vote was equally divided: 167-167.

Jewish school to open in Cologne

The German city of Cologne will soon have its first Jewish elementary school since World War II.

Starting this September, about 20 first-graders will attend classes at the Lauder Morijah Elementary School.

Venice Ghetto returns to normal; security was tight during terror threat

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The historic Venice Ghetto returned to calm early this week after three days of intensive police controls following an unspecified terrorist threat.

"Things seem back to normal today," Michaela Zanon of the Venice Jewish Museum told JTA. "There are still police on duty, but nothing like over the weekend."

Venice authorities launched a massive security action on July 11, apparently in response to a tip that the city's centuries-old Jewish quarter, a popular tourist attraction, could be a terrorist target.

"There was an alert," Zanon said. "Police were stationed on every street leading into the ghetto and searched every bag anyone was carrying."

Police stopped tourists and residents alike and checked their identity papers. They also guarded a number of bridges. Meanwhile, police boats patrolled the waters of the canals surrounding the ghetto and divers went into the lagoon to search for bombs.

The measures were maintained until Sunday. During the alert, Venice Mayor Paolo Costa, speaking on Italian state TV, urged residents to go about their business as usual.

The ghetto has been the center of Jewish life in Venice for 500 years.

The area is on the site of an old foundry where Jews were segregated in 1516. It was Europe's first example of a forced Jewish settlement, and the word "ghetto" is believed to derive from "geto," the word for foundry in the Venetian dialect.

In addition to the museum, which encompasses several magnificent synagogues in and around the Ghetto Nuovo, the main square of the district, the ghetto is the site of the headquarters of the 500-strong local Jewish community.

There is also a Chabad house and a Chabad yeshiva on Ghetto Nuovo, as well as a Jewish old-age home, a Holocaust memorial and Jewish souvenir shops. A few steps away are a kosher restaurant and the centuries-old synagogue regularly used by the community. Most Venetian Jews, however, live in other parts of the city, including the mainland suburb of Mestre.

Zanon said that despite the security alert, tour groups and individual tourists continued to visit the museum. "We were open normally and had the number of visitors we would have expected," she said.

The security operation came after Italian news media outlets, quoting a government report, said that Islamic militants linked to Al-Qaida had made plans for terrorist attacks in Italy last year and were scouting locations in Venice.

Italy has been at the center of several investigations targeting alleged Al-Qaida operatives or cells.

Security had already been beefed up to some extent in the ghetto since the intifada erupted nearly two years ago. Police have kept Jewish sites and institutions in Rome under constant armed guard since a Palestinian terrorist attack on the main synagogue in 1982, which killed a child and injured dozens.

Despite news reports that said security measures had also been tightened in Rome over the weekend, Jewish community spokesman Riccardo Pacifici said the situation was normal.

"I don't remember a time when we have not feared an attack," he said. □

Panel to deal with suicide bombers

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer formed a task force to deal with the problem of Palestinian suicide bombers.

Ben-Eliezer told the Cabinet on Sunday that the team would consider possible actions to deter attacks, including deporting families of bombers from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, demolishing bombers' homes, blocking the transfer of funds to bombers' families and arresting religious leaders who encourage terror attacks.

The task force will also have to devise a new way of profiling potential suicide bombers. According to an analysis by military and security officials, of 54 suicide bombers from the West Bank, only 60 percent fit the "bomber profile" assembled five years ago by the Shin Bet domestic security service. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Mideast diplomacy resumes,
but can any formula be found?***By Mitchell Danow*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Middle East diplomacy shifted to New York this week amid widespread skepticism that there is any formula that can convince Israel and the Palestinians to make even slight progress toward peace.

Officials from a group known as the Quartet — the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia — were meeting here in an effort to devise a strategy that would help Israel and the Palestinians overcome their seemingly intractable differences. Egyptian, Saudi and Jordanian diplomats were also slated to take part in the meetings, which were getting off the ground on Tuesday.

Questions have already been raised, however, whether Quartet officials will be able to reach agreement among themselves on how to go forward — to say nothing about whether Israeli or Palestinian officials will be willing to accept any proposals emerging from the Quartet.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres reportedly wrote to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who is hosting the meeting in New York, requesting that the Quartet display unanimity in their proposals in order to increase the likelihood of meaningful progress.

The meetings come three weeks after President Bush stunned many by calling for the ouster of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and coming down so strongly on Israel's side.

Since then, many have questioned how to move forward with the vision he outlined. In addition to calling for a new Palestinian leadership, Bush said June 24 that he envisioned a provisional Palestinian state within three years, but only after the Palestinians implement serious economic and political reforms.

Now, during the New York meeting, Arab leaders are reportedly preparing to present a plan calling for international recognition of a Palestinian state, followed by a two-year period to work out the final borders.

The Arab plan calls for Palestinian elections for a new leader and Parliament in January. The Associated Press reported Monday, citing an unnamed diplomatic source.

Shortly after the elections, the Palestinians would seek U.N. recognition for a Palestinian state based on the borders that existed before the 1967 Six-Day War, the source said.

This would be unacceptable to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who has ruled out such borders. But observers believe it could serve as the basis for further negotiations.

For his part, Sharon has long maintained that there would be no negotiations with the Palestinians as long as violence continues.

With the current lull in Palestinian terror attacks on Israeli civilians — coming as the army maintains its firm grip on Palestinian population centers in the West Bank — some observers believe there is now an opportunity for Israel and the Palestinian Authority to get back to the negotiating table.

However, Sharon, too, has said Arafat must be replaced before there can be any meaningful negotiations.

Arafat was among the topics discussed when Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer met Monday with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

After the meeting in Alexandria, Ben-Eliezer said he and Mubarak had disagreed over whether Arafat should be sidelined.

According to Ben-Eliezer, Mubarak believed peace efforts could continue with Arafat remaining as head of the Palestinian Authority. "According to what we believe," Ben-Eliezer told reporters, Arafat "was and still is the main problem."

In another development, Sharon agreed Sunday to further meetings between Peres and Palestinian officials.

The talks, slated to be held this week, were to focus on ways of improving the lives of Palestinian civilians, but were not to tackle any diplomatic issues.

Sharon canceled a meeting Saturday night between Peres and Palestinian officials. According to Israeli media reports, Sharon objected to the participation of Palestinian Authority official Saeb Erekat, who is considered too close to Arafat.

He reversed his position after a meeting Sunday with Peres, during which Sharon set out the parameters for Peres' talks with the Palestinians.

Observers said the canceled meeting was part of an ongoing disagreement between Sharon and Peres over how to proceed in the contacts with the Palestinians and a turf war between them over the diplomatic effort in general.

Sharon's decision to cancel Saturday's meeting reportedly angered Peres, as did another Sharon decision to send the director general of the Prime Minister's Office, Dov Weisglass, and the prime minister's military adviser, Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinski, to the United States. The two were due to meet with senior U.S. officials to coordinate positions prior to the meeting of the Quartet in New York.

Peres reportedly complained to Sharon that he had been left out of the loop and demanded that a Foreign Ministry representative be included in the trip.

Instead, Sharon canceled the trip and sent a telegram to Powell outlining the Israeli position. According to reports, Sharon stressed in the telegram that security is still Israel's utmost priority.

The prime minister also dismissed Arafat's claims of taking steps to reform the Palestinian Authority.

Such steps have merely been "cosmetic," Sharon reportedly said in the message.

Sharon's telegram came on the heels of one sent to Powell by Arafat in which the Palestinian leader spelled out his vision for reforms in the Palestinian Authority.

Last week, Peres held separate meetings with the newly appointed Palestinian interior and finance ministers in what were the first high-level sessions between the two sides in months.

It was no coincidence that Peres limited those meetings to two newly appointed Palestinian Cabinet ministers. According to Israeli media reports, Sharon is staunchly opposed to holding contacts with any Palestinian officials "tainted" by terrorism.

There have been no terror attacks on Israeli civilians since mid-June, when 31 Israelis were killed in three successive attacks.

Many Israelis credit the lull in terror to the Israel Defense Force's ongoing anti-terror campaign in the West Bank.

During the campaign, according to security officials, the army has arrested some 200 wanted Palestinians and thwarted several attempted terror attacks.

Over the weekend alone, the army said it prevented two such attacks. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report)