



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Troops kill top terrorist

Israeli troops began withdrawing to the outskirts of the West Bank city of Jenin on Sunday, a day after killing Islamic Jihad's local military commander.

Iyad Sawalhe was killed in an exchange of fire with Israeli troops Saturday after he was discovered by troops in a hideout built behind a kitchen wall.

Israeli officials said Sawalhe was responsible for a series of terror attacks that killed 31 Israelis and wounded some 90 others.

Soldier killed by Gaza mine blast

An Israeli army tracker was killed Saturday when a mine exploded near the Gaza settlement of Netzarim.

Sgt. Maj. Madin Grifat, 23 of Beit Zarzir, was critically wounded in the explosion and later died in a hospital. Another soldier was moderately hurt in the blast.

The Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it came in response to Israel's killing of a West Bank Islamic Jihad leader earlier in the day in Jenin.

But Israeli army sources said such mine attacks were planned over a long period and that the bomb had probably been planted before the Jenin raid, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Likud ministers spar over plan

An American "road map" for Israel-Palestinian peace is becoming a political hot potato for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his newly sworn-in foreign and defense ministers.

Sharon reportedly prevented Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz from commenting on the U.S. initiative at Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting.

Sharon's move followed media reports that Mofaz is critical of the proposal.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who assailed the initiative last week, said over the weekend that he did not intend to try to change government policy in the time leading up to the elections.

In another development, the Likud Party plans to hold its primary on Nov. 28.

The two contenders for the party leadership, Sharon and Netanyahu, agreed on the date during a meeting Sunday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel program directors grapple with smaller numbers caused by violence

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Directors of Israel-based programs for young Jews have a long-term concern these days: How will today's Diaspora Jewish teen-agers develop a connection with Israel when they've never had the opportunity to visit?

The more short-term worry is how to get more kids to participate in their programs.

As the intifada enters its third year, Israel programs are looking at a 92 percent decrease in the number of Jewish youth participating in educational trips to Israel. That means a generation of Jewish teen-agers, college students and young adults who never have been to Israel.

"We might miss half a generation," said Joe Breman, CEO of the Alexander Muss High School in Israel program. "In 30 or 40 years from now, when we need people to make decisions in the Jewish community, it will be people who will have missed a significant element of contemporary Jewish life."

In the summer of 2002, only 820 high school-aged kids visited Israel on organized trips, down from 10,000 in the year 2000. Around 60 percent of the 820 were on Orthodox programs, while only 322 came on non-Orthodox programs through half a dozen organizations.

"We're losing participants, and we're losing counselors who can sell Israel to their campers," said Shelly Dorph, national director of Camp Ramah, which runs several camps in North America.

This number does not include Orthodox Jews who go to Israel between high school and college. Enrollment in those post-high school yeshivas in Israel is believed to have remained relatively stable.

In an attempt to better understand and confront the problem, 60 program directors and staff members gathered late last month in Jerusalem to discuss ways of sustaining Israel programs during these tough times, as well as how to promote community awareness of the trips. The consensus? Israel programs need to think about the long term and to think about ways to keep Israel on the agenda of the American Jewish community until the situation returns to normal.

"In the '90s, everything was working so well for us, programs were growing, and Israel programs provided real client satisfaction," said Elan Ezrachi, director of educational programs and experiences at the department for Jewish education with the Jewish Agency for Israel. "The only time we consulted with one another was on marketing strategies."

As part of the three-day conference, the directors discussed their goals, messages and methods for raising the Israel experience program on the community agenda.

Here's one sample message: "The one Jewish journey you can never replace. Israel. Let our children go."

Echoes of Soviet Jewry? Maybe. Yet most directors find that they face resistance from parents, not kids.

"The kids still want to go to Israel," said Dorph, who usually sends more than 200 campers to Israel on Ramah Seminar, a six-week teen tour geared toward Ramah campers, but sent only 72 this year. "We haven't devised a strategy to let parents let their kids go."

Gathered in informal groups on the sunny lawns of Kiryat Moriah, the Jewish Agency's educational campus in Jerusalem, the participants debated advertising campaigns, security measures, communal attitudes and parental fears. For instance, it

MIDEAST FOCUS

Car explosion kills 2 Palestinians

A car carrying two Palestinians exploded Sunday near Israel's border with the West Bank.

Israeli police said they called for the driver to stop after the car aroused their suspicions. A moment later, the car exploded. Police suspect the pair were on their way to carry out a suicide attack. There were no Israeli casualties.

Two alleged terrorists nabbed

Israel's army arrested two terrorists allegedly planning suicide bombings. One was a 15-year-old youth from Nablus who was on his way to carry out a suicide bombing when he was caught, the army said.

The other, a senior Hamas member, was allegedly masterminding an attack from Hebron, army added.

Jordanian killed along border

A man suspected of trying to infiltrate into Israel from Jordan was killed by Jordanian troops Sunday. An Israeli border patrol had spotted the suspicious figure and alerted Jordanian troops on the other side of the border, Israel Radio reported.

Israeli terrorism expert dies at 62

Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak, a counter-terrorism expert and adviser to prime ministers, died last Friday of cancer at 62.

Sprinzak was recognized around the world as an authority on terrorism, extremist politics and the radical right in Israel. He was founding dean of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, after serving on the political science faculty for many years at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

A former adviser to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, he reportedly warned Rabin that he might face an assassination attempt.

is difficult to convince parents to send their children to Israel using magazine and newspaper ads when the advertisement on the next page asks for donations for terror victims, pointed out Ryan Hass, a representative of the Jewish Agency's educational department.

If Jewish identity is the plug, it won't work on the average Jewish parent, said Rick Sherman, a participant from Manchester, England, on Habonim Dror's yearlong service and leadership program.

"They don't care about identity," Sherman said. "Identity is giving 100 British pounds sterling on Kol Nidre."

One response could be to use program alumni to convince the parents of potential applicants, suggested Bari Weiss, an 18-year-old currently studying on Nativ, a freshman year college program sponsored by United Synagogue Youth.

"Let the kids be the trailblazers," Weiss said. "Let them convince the parents how much their children will learn on these programs, about religion, Jewish identity and Zionism."

But it's still difficult to convince certain parents that they are making the right decision for their children, said Yossi Garr, USY's shaliach in New York and a participant in the conference.

Particularly on July 31, which was the last day to decide whether to join Nativ. It also was the day of a bombing at Hebrew University's Mt. Scopus campus, where Nativ participants study for one semester.

"Our kids eat lunch at the Frank Sinatra cafeteria every day," said Garr, referring to the cafeteria where the bombing took place, killing nine.

In a conference call held several days later, the parents of the 23 participants were looking for reassurances from USY staff and each other. For each parent, knowing that the other 22 parents were about to send their child to Israel made it a lot easier, Garr said.

The problem isn't the programming, nor is it the security, which is as good as can be, program directors agreed. Most directors have had to tinker with their programs to tighten security, narrowing time spent in major cities, forbidding public transportation and coming up with creative alternatives for six-week, six-month or yearlong programs.

Ramah is planning a European tour for summer 2003, which will include 10 days in Israel. The organization also will bring Israeli kids on the trip, in order to emphasize more personal contact.

Everyone has made adjustments, but no one can make up for the huge drop in participation, said Breman, whose Alexander Muss program has 250 students this year, down from the usual 800 to 900.

The last time Israel programs experienced such a tremendous drop was during the first intifada in the late 1980s, when participation rates dropped around 50 percent for several years. It took nearly a decade for programs to return to their normal figures.

"We have to find a way to tell the communities that what we do is a priority," Breman said. "There is a lack of understanding, a lack of advocacy for presenting this in an intelligent, comprehensive manner. We're all in this together."

For now, the directors have prepared a focused advocacy plan that can be used by any organization with its own constituency, and at the upcoming General Assembly in Philadelphia in late November.

The next step will be for the Jewish Agency to take operational steps to help organizations that want to strengthen their numbers this summer. "The focus is clear," said Ezechiel. "You can do programs in Israel, even under tense conditions." □

Museum shows Nazi persecution of gays

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum will open a new exhibit about the Nazi persecution of gays.

What is being described as the first major exhibit on the subject will show how the Nazis believed it was possible to "cure" homosexual behavior through labor, imprisonment and "re-education." An estimated 5,000 to 15,000 gays were sent to concentration camps, where an unknown number died.

The exhibit will be in the Washington museum from Nov. 15 to March 16, and then will travel around the country. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Berlin Jews mark Kristallnacht

Berlin's Jewish community marked the 64th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Several hundred people, among them German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein, gathered for Saturday's commemoration at the city's main Jewish community center, which stands on the site of a synagogue destroyed Nov. 9, 1938.

"After that night, no one in Germany could say they knew nothing," Ralph Giordano, a German Jewish essayist, said at the commemoration. "It was a dress rehearsal."

By the time the Kristallnacht rampage ended on Nov. 10, more than 1,000 synagogues in Germany and Austria had been destroyed.

In the following days, several hundred Jews were killed or committed suicide.

Rabbi trial moves on

The defense is preparing to present its case this week in the trial of a New Jersey rabbi charged with arranging the contract murder of his wife in 1994.

Last week, the prosecution rested its case by rereading some of Rabbi Fred Neulander's testimony from his first trial.

In the testimony, Neulander admitted to an affair and tried to explain what some have called his unemotional reaction when he found his wife's body.

Neulander could face the death penalty if he is convicted.

CNN: Terrorists met in S. America

Terrorist leaders met recently in South America to plan attacks on U.S. and Israeli targets, CNN reported. The September meeting took place in the border area where Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil meet.

Sources said the meeting brought together officials from Hezbollah and other terrorist groups. The lawless tri-border region is considered a haven for arms traffickers, smugglers and counterfeiters.

Home to about 20,000 Lebanese Muslims, the region has been described by the U.S. State Department as a "focal point for Islamic extremism in Latin America."

Grenade found at Jewish club

An anti-tank grenade was found at a Jewish club in the Argentine city of La Plata.

The unexploded grenade found last Friday at the city's Max Nordeau Jewish Club had been placed in a cookie box.

It was accompanied by a note that read, "Jews out of the neighborhood." About 250 Jews are members of the club, which is dedicated to sports and cultural activities.

Anti-Israel show on S. African TV airs as Islamic Ramadan fast begins

By Michael Belling

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — South African TV viewers were subjected to a prime-time Israel bashing session last week.

Despite of strenuous objections from groups including the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the two-and-a-half hour program was broadcast Nov. 6 by e.tv, an independent television network.

The broadcast was timed to coincide with the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan that same evening.

The broadcast included the anti-Israel documentary, "Palestine Is Still the Issue," by British filmmaker John Pilger. The documentary caused an outcry when it was broadcast in Britain on Yom Kippur.

Pilger has been an outspoken opponent of Israel stance for almost 30 years.

Russell Gaddin, national chairman of the Board of Deputies, said e.tv went ahead with the broadcast even though it knew the documentary "had been discredited abroad and in South Africa."

The decision to air the documentary "flies in the face of even-handed and objective reporting," he added.

Yehuda Kay, national director of the Jewish Board of Deputies, criticized the Pilger film.

"No effort is made to provide context, Israeli perspective or explanation. It is in no way representative of the true situation," he said.

The board said the documentary "dehumanized, delegitimized and debased" Israel and Israelis.

In the documentary, Pilger launched a series of accusations against Israel, including that it was guilty of "ethnic cleansing" in 1948 to make room for the Jewish state; that it maintained a brutal and illegal occupation of Palestinian lands; and that it tried to stop all criticism with accusations of anti-Semitism.

Pilger also drew analogies between Israel and both apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany.

The e.tv broadcast went further than simply airing the documentary.

It began with an interview with Pilger by journalist Debra Patter, who never alluded to any of the charges of inaccuracy and bias voiced by critics of the film.

The broadcast also included a 30-minute debate between Ronnie Kasrils — a Jew who serves as South Africa's Minister of Water Affairs and who founded last year a pro-Palestinian activist group — and Hagai Segal, a British academic and Middle East commentator.

Kasrils, who referred disparagingly to "Zionists," criticized what he termed the plight of the "Palestinians under the jackboot of the Israeli state."

Israel's only defender during the broadcast, Segal blasted the "hysteria history and propaganda history" that had been presented.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, brought the program to a close with an interview he gave Patter.

Tutu, whose recent criticism of Israel was quoted in Pilger's film, said he had a "sense of revulsion and distress that we as human beings can still treat one another with so much brutality."

Referring not only to the Middle East, he pointed out "how easy it is to be afflicted by amnesia when people who were yesterday's oppressed so easily become today's oppressors."

Tutu, who is a board member of the Peres Peace Center in Tel Aviv, said he felt "deeply saddened by how quickly the charge of anti-Semitism is leveled against those who want to point up injustices."

He added: "In order to assuage the guilt of Europe (for the Holocaust), the people who are being made to pay are the Palestinians."

Following the broadcast, Segal told JTA that the danger of such a show was that, by trying to blame only one side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it made the lines of division deeper. □

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Kazakh Jewry's diversity stems from history of exile and refuge

By Lev Krichevsky

ALMATY, Kazakhstan (JTA) — For Nazilya Biniyaminova, the best word to describe the atmosphere at her school is diversity.

"Just imagine: We speak six different languages between ourselves," said the 10th-grader at Almaty's Or Avner-Gershuni Jewish day school.

A native of Azerbaijan, Biniyaminova speaks Judeo-Persian, the language of the "Mountain Jews" of the Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union, as do some other students.

While most students speak Russian to each other, many also communicate in their native languages — Kazakh, the Judeo-Tajik language of Bukharan Jews, Georgian or Ukrainian.

Coming from various backgrounds — many are from mixed Jewish-Russian or Jewish-Kazakh families — the students are the face of Kazakh Jewry today.

Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan — whose 15 million people belong to more than 100 ethnic groups — has been promoting religious diversity as the nation's leadership opens to the West.

As citizens of Kazakhstan freed themselves from the country's Communist past, they also began to rediscover their cultural and religious roots.

A decade later, Jews — especially those with mixed heritage — continue to join the community.

Rabbi Me'er Sheyner, a young Lubavitch emissary, started the Or Avner-Gershuni School four years ago with just 37 students.

"People kept joking that we would have to bring Jews from Israel to fill the school," recalled Sheyner, who serves as chairman of the Association of Religious Congregations of Kazakhstan, an umbrella organization for groups affiliated with the worldwide Lubavitch movement.

Today the school has 152 students, aged 6 to 17.

Another day school opened in September in the city of Karaganda in eastern Kazakhstan. "We are trying to give people some taste of Judaism," Sheyner said. "Most Jews here know so little about their heritage that they seem to have no reason to love or respect Jewish tradition."

Kazakhstan was the second-largest republic in the former Soviet Union. Ethnic Kazakhs, who make up about 60 percent of the population, are Asian Muslims descended from Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes that were ruled by the Mongols from the 13th century until the Russian conquest in the 18th and 19th centuries.

After independence, many non-Kazakhs — including Jews — saw their career opportunities shrinking as Kazakhs were unofficially favored over minorities. Economic hardship forced thousands of Jews to leave the country. Hundreds still leave each year for the United States, Germany or Israel.

Yet there is a sense in the Jewish community that its fledgling market economy and religious freedom make Kazakhstan a place to build the future.

Alexander Stepantsov, also a 10th-grader at Or Avner-Gershuni, wants to study medicine.

"I would probably stay here or go to Israel. It depends on where I find a better school," he said. "As long as you can make a decent living here, there is no reason to go elsewhere," said Alexander Butsenik, 25, a computer professional.

Butsenik spoke in the yard of the Almaty synagogue, the primary address for local Jews to socialize. Butsenik said he comes to the synagogue at least once a week, less for the service than to meet friends.

On a recent weekday evening, five elderly women gathered near the synagogue and listened as one read a letter she had received from her daughter, who moved to Israel 11 years ago.

"She writes that she and the family are doing fine, but they miss Almaty and want to come visit," explained the woman, who gave her name as Nina Iosifovna.

Synagogues, the most visible symbol of Jewish revival, are being built in all major cities. Plans are underway to erect synagogues in 12 major regional centers — none of which, aside from Almaty, ever had a Jewish house of prayer. Until recently, in fact, Kazakhstan had just one permanent minyan.

The synagogue construction project is the brainchild of local tycoon Alexander Mashkevich, president of the Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan.

Estimates of the country's Jewish community range from 7,000 to 20,000 people. Most live in Almaty, the largest city and, until 1997, the capital.

Kazakh Jews have a relatively short history: Few Jewish families can trace their roots here more than three generations back.

Small groups of Bukharan Jews from neighboring Uzbekistan settled here centuries ago, but historical records show that the first known Jewish community — including 48 soldiers who had completed their service in the czar's army — settled in Kazakhstan some 120 years ago.

In 1882 the first synagogue was established in Verniy, as Almaty was known then.

"Most of us in Kazakhstan suffered the same fate," said Adolf Artsishevsky, 65, editor of the Jewish magazine *Shalom*. "Few people, both Jews and non-Jews, came here on their own."

Artsishevsky's own grandparents were exiled to Kazakhstan from Ukraine in the 1930s as part of the Stalinist repression.

One of his grandfathers perished in Karlag, a large labor camp in eastern Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's endless steppes, bordered by snow-capped mountains in the south, also offered safe harbor to many Jews from who fled Ukraine and Belarus during the Holocaust.

Hundreds of those who fled or were exiled to Kazakhstan are buried in the Jewish section of an Almaty cemetery.

Among them is Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, father of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Removed from his post as rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, Schneerson was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1939 and died five years later in Almaty. His grave has become a pilgrimage site for many Jews.

Many Soviet Jews moved to Kazakhstan after the Holocaust because it was easier to find economic prosperity in remote regions. Some came in the 1950s and 1960s, when extensive agricultural development of the region's virgin land made Kazakhstan — until then known for its mineral riches — into one of the Soviet Union's leading grain producers.

The country is huge — it is four times the size of the state of Texas — and sparsely populated, complicating the work of Jewish organizations. □

The Jews of Kazakhstan

Part 2 of a Series