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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hammas: Terror is working

Palestinian suicide bombings are effective, despite Israeli claims that Israel will never bow to terror, a top Hamas official said. Abdel Aziz Rantissi made the comment after a suicide bomber killed 11 people aboard a Jerusalem bus. [Page 1]

Jewish support for Bush wanes

A majority of U.S. Jews rate President Bush's leadership on the Middle East as fair or poor, according to a new poll.

The study, funded jointly by American for Peace Now and the Arab American Institute, also found that both the Jewish and Arab communities in the United States would like the Bush administration to steer a middle course in the peace process.

Only 5 percent of Jews surveyed rated Bush's handling of the Middle East as excellent, with 23 percent saying it was good, 38 percent calling it fair and 31 percent describing it as poor. The poll, produced by Zogby International in late October, has a 4.5 percent margin of error.

Yeshiva U. eyes Hillel head

Hillel President Richard Joel, who led a rebirth of the campus organization, is being considered as Yeshiva University's next president.

An executive search committee seeking a successor to President Norman Lamm is reportedly holding talks with Joel to head modern Orthodoxy's flagship institution.

Joel has raised millions of dollars from major philanthropists to turn Hillel from a foundering network of religious chapters into a high-profile organization seeking to rekindle Jewish life on campus. Joel could not be reached for comment on the reports.

Harvard reinvites poet

Harvard University's English Department reinvited a controversial Irish poet who once said West Bank settlers should be "shot dead."

One week after his appearance was canceled because of his anti-Israeli comments, members of the department met for two hours Wednesday and voted to reinvite Tom Paulin. "Free speech was a principle that needed upholding here," English professor Peter Sacks said Wednesday night.

NEWS ANALYSIS

As Israeli elections approach, terrorists may 'elect' the winner

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — It is barely a week into Israel's election campaign season and Palestinian terrorists want their voices to be heard.

A suicide bombing aboard a crowded Jerusalem bus Thursday sent the apparent message that there will be no halt to terror as Israelis spend the next two months deciding who their next leader will be.

Eleven people were killed and about 50 wounded in Thursday's bus attack. Many of the passengers were schoolchildren.

Ten of the victims were from Jerusalem: Hodaya Asaraf, 13; Marina Bazarski, 46; Yelena-Hadassah Ben-David, 32; Kira Perlman, 67, and her grandson Ilan Perlman, 8; Sima Novak, 56; Yafit Ravivo, 13; Ella Sharshovsky, 44, and her son Michael Sharshovsky, 16; and Dikla Zino, 20.

The 11th victim, Varga Mirsa, 25, was a tourist from Romania.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack, but Palestinian sources reportedly said the bomber belonged to Islamic Jihad. Last week, after Palestinian snipers killed 11 Israelis in Hebron, the two groups also competed for "bragging rights."

In the wake of the attack, a top Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, Abdel Aziz Rantissi, apparently decided to rub salt in Israel's wounds, stating that Palestinian suicide bombings are an effective weapon, despite Israeli claims that the Jewish state will never bow to terror.

Rantissi said such attacks are what prompted the newly elected leader of Israel's Labor Party, Amram Mitzna, to declare this week that he would uproot Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip immediately upon taking office.

Mitzna, in an interview with the Israeli daily Ha'aretz before he won the Labor Party's leadership primary Tuesday, also said he would resume talks with the Palestinians without condition and would withdraw from most of the West Bank within a year of taking office.

Given Mitzna's dovish stance, one might wonder why Rantissi said what he did, particularly since it was highly likely to make at least some Israeli voters question whether they would really want to support Mitzna.

Then there is another consideration: Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is squaring off against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon next week in a Likud leadership primary.

Rantissi's comments — to say nothing of Thursday's brutal bus bombing — could prompt Likud voters to back the more hawkish Netanyahu over Sharon.

The latest opinion polls show Sharon likely to beat Netanyahu in the Nov. 28 Likud vote, but they were based on surveys conducted before Thursday's terror attack.

Additional attacks before the Likud vote — or more statements from Hamas like those made by Rantissi — could change the outcome of the primary.

And with the winner of the Likud primary likely to become Israel's next prime minister — as current opinion polls suggest — Hamas terrorists could well be on their way toward helping the cause of Israeli hawks, as they did back in 1996.

At that time, a series of deadly terror attacks were widely cited as helping Netanyahu narrowly defeat Shimon Peres in the race for the premiership.

If Hamas finds it preferable to have an Israeli hawk in office, then the movement will likely attempt more terrorism during the current Israeli election campaign. Indeed,

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. envoy blasts P.A.

The Palestinian leadership has made no progress in instituting reforms or in stopping terror, the U.S. ambassador to Israel said. Speaking to a delegation of New York elected officials visiting Israel, Daniel Kurtzer said the Palestinian Authority has not met the two prerequisites for a Palestinian state laid out by President Bush in June, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Far from clamping down on terrorism, the P.A. has "in some ways" been behind "an intensification of suicide bombings and other efforts to commit what's now called a mega-terrorist act," Kurtzer said. "On the reform efforts, we have had equally a lack of success. We have seen too much control continuing to be exerted by Mr. Arafat, and too little control evolving from other members of his Cabinet."

Labor showdown averted

Israel's Labor Party averted a showdown when party officials agreed to hold open primaries for the party's list of Knesset candidates. Forces allied with the former Labor leader, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, withdrew a proposal to cancel the open primaries.

The move came as the 4,700-member Labor Party convention gathered Thursday. Newly elected party leader Amram Mitzna wanted to have the open primary, in which more than 100,000 party members across Israel could vote. Ben-Eliezer had wanted to let the smaller party convention, where he is believed to have sizable support, determine the Knesset list.

Barghouti trial resumes

The trial of Palestinian militia leader Marwan Barghouti resumed in a Tel Aviv court Thursday.

Barghouti is charged with involvement in the killing of dozens of Israelis in terrorist attacks. At the opening of the proceedings, Barghouti reiterated his refusal to recognize the authority of Israel to try him.

Hamas may well prefer Sharon or Netanyahu over Mitzna. A hawkish Israeli leader, by Hamas calculations, would make a peace accord that much harder to achieve — and Hamas has long made it clear that peace with Israel is not on its agenda.

Meanwhile, officials in the Palestinian Authority — whom Sharon has long accused of being complicit in terror — welcomed the call from Mitzna to restart peace talks.

Some Palestinian officials said they believe they could reach a peace settlement with Israel if the dovish ex-general is elected prime minister.

On Wednesday, the morning after Mitzna's victory in the Labor leadership vote, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat welcomed the vote's outcome.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday in Ramallah, Arafat said he was prepared to complete the peace process with Mitzna.

But Arafat and his aides have stopped short of giving an outright endorsement of Mitzna.

Palestinian backing for Mitzna could well boomerang among Israeli voters — just as Sharon's attempts to sideline Arafat only bolstered the Palestinian leader's popularity among his constituents.

Meanwhile, Mitzna is far from embarrassed by the positive signals coming from the Palestinian Authority.

"If the biggest of our enemies is congratulating me on my election, perhaps that is a sign that in the future there will be someone with whom to talk and something to talk about," Mitzna told Israel Radio.

Across the Israeli political spectrum, officials have spent more than two years trying to come up with an effective formula for dealing with Palestinian terrorism.

Sharon has chosen the military option, while Mitzna offers the prospect of negotiations that come with no preconditions.

But even should Israeli voters want to try Mitzna's course of action, past experience has shown that diplomacy does not bring an end to terror attacks from Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups.

For now, however, the question facing Sharon was how to deal with the latest attack.

Following the bus bombing, Sharon convened his Security Cabinet for an emergency meeting to discuss Israel's response.

The blast occurred at 7:15 a.m. as Egged bus No. 20 was leaving the Jerusalem neighborhood of Kiryat Menachem heading to the center of the city.

Police said the terrorist boarded the bus and traveled several stops before detonating a powerful bomb.

World leaders condemned the bus bombing. President Bush said he is "greatly disturbed" by the attack. At the same time, Bush said it remains U.S. policy to see two independent states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

Bush made the comments during a meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Prague. Blair called the attack an "outrage."

Strong condemnations were also issued by the European Union and Germany.

Israel's president, Moshe Katsav, urged the nations of the world, especially Europe, to threaten to cut ties with Arafat if he does not put a halt to Palestinian terrorism.

Katsav said such a threat would be far more effective than most anything Israel can do, Israel Radio reported.

One student, 10th-grader Maor Kimche, 15, told The Associated Press that he had just boarded the bus when the blast went off.

"Suddenly, it was black and smoky. There were people on the floor. Everything was bloody. There was glass everywhere, and body parts," Kimche said.

Kimche, who was lightly injured in the left leg, jumped out of a bus window and was scooped up by a taxi driver who took him to nearby Hadassah Hospital, Ein Kerem, according to the AP report.

Following the attack, Netanyahu came to the hospital with 10 ambassadors to Israel to visit victims. The Russian ambassador to Israel met with a 25-year-old woman who had made aliyah from the former Soviet Union and put her through on the phone to her parents in Russia.

Commenting on Hadassah's role in dealing with Israeli terror victims from a host of attacks, Netanyahu told the envoys, "You have no idea how many victims have been saved at this hospital."



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JEWISH WORLD

Bill would exempt survivors

The U.S. Congress has approved a bill providing a permanent tax exemption for restitution payments made to Holocaust survivors and their families.

The bill goes to President Bush after the Senate passed the measure by voice vote Wednesday before it adjourned for the year.

The House of Representatives approved the bill in June. There are more than 100,000 people in the United States who will benefit from the legislation, said Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Ill.), a lead sponsor of the bill.

Senate passes Egypt resolution

The U.S. Senate passed a resolution calling on the Egyptian government to prevent continued broadcasting of a television series deemed anti-Semitic.

The bill, sponsored by Sens. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) and Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), condemned "Horseman Without a Horse" as a tool of anti-Jewish incitement and called on Egypt to "publicly condemn anti-Semitism as a form of bigotry."

Nazi comedy airs in Germany

A comedy about the Nazis debuted Wednesday on German television. "Goebbels and Geduldig," a farce about the Nazi propaganda minister and a good-humored Jewish lookalike who swap places in 1944, shattered a half-century taboo on poking fun at the country's Nazi past.

"I heard about a questionnaire that said 70 percent of Germans feel they must not laugh about the Nazis," the show's writer, Peter Steinbach, told JTA before the comedy aired. "That was very shocking."

The conservative daily Die Welt newspaper said the comedy may deserve plaudits for attempting to break ground, but added that it failed for a simple reason: It isn't funny.

Belarussian lawmakers appeal

Belarussian lawmakers appealed to the country's president to stop construction on Jewish sites in Minsk.

The lawmakers called on Alexander Lukashenko to halt building on the site of a 19th-century synagogue and over the ruins of a 16th-century synagogue, which was destroyed by the Soviet authorities in the 1970s.

Seventy-five members of the 121-member House of Representatives, the lower house of the country's Parliament, signed the appeal Tuesday in a rare show of dissent in the chamber, which is controlled by the authoritarian Lukashenko.

The appeal was initiated by the Jewish Religious Union of the Republic of Belarus, an umbrella group for Orthodox Jewish congregations, and the New York-based World Association of Belarussian Jews.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Victorious Islamic party promises to respect Turkey's ties with Israel

By Yigal Schleifer

ISTANBUL, Turkey (JTA) — The landslide victory of a party with Islamic roots in Turkey's recent parliamentary elections would seem to spell trouble for the country's growing business and military relationship with Israel.

But leaders of the winning party insist there will be no change in Israel policy under their government, and Turkish political analysts and observers say the bilateral relationship will continue to grow.

The Justice and Development Party, known as AKP, won the election with 34 percent of the vote and most likely will form Turkey's first single-party government in 15 years. The party was founded a year ago by members of the reformist wing of a banned Islamic party.

The party is led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a popular former mayor of Istanbul who is prohibited from holding office due to a 1999 conviction for anti-secular activities.

AKP has chosen Abdullah Gul, a moderate who until recently was the party's spokesman, to serve as prime minister.

Israel and the Middle East did not figure prominently in the election campaign, which was dominated by domestic economic issues and the question of Turkey's bid for E.U. membership.

But the relationship between Israel and Turkey is an important policy issue for both countries, especially since the strategic and economic connections between the two regional powers have deepened significantly during the last five years.

Bilateral trade now stands at around \$1 billion a year, with Israeli tourism to Turkey's Mediterranean coast growing rapidly.

Among the major military agreements signed recent is a \$780 million deal for Israel to upgrade Turkish M-60 tanks. The two countries also are negotiating a 20-year deal, valued at \$20 million to \$50 million, for Israel to buy fresh water from Turkey and have it shipped to Israel by large tankers.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, Erdogan said Turkey's ties with Israel would be maintained.

"Turkey will continue its ties with Israel on the basis of the common interests of both sides," Erdogan said.

According to recent reports in Turkey, Erdogan has referred to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policies toward the Palestinians as "terrorism."

When asked by Ma'ariv if he condemned Palestinian attacks on Israelis, Erdogan said, "Terror has no religion and no race. Terror should be condemned regardless of its source."

Despite the reassuring words, Israeli officials say they will be watching the new government's actions closely.

"The biggest concern deals with strategic issues, since Turkey is strategic to us in every respect," said an Israeli Foreign Ministry official who deals with Turkey. "We will have to judge them according to what they do, not what they say."

Aydan Kodaloglu, an Ankara political consultant active in promoting Israel-Turkey relations, said she has spoken with a number of senior AKP members who say the party will enhance the country's relationship with Israel.

"So far they have been following a very careful approach, both to national Turkey and the international arena," she said.

Ilter Turan, a professor of politics at Istanbul Bilgi University, said he does not expect the new government to change Turkey's stance on Israel.

"There seems to be a sensitivity among the new team not to delve into areas that would cause a lot of tensions in society, and delving into the relations with Israel would cause tensions," Turan said.

Turkey's 25,000 Jews, meanwhile, are approaching the election results with caution.

"There is this question mark: Is Erdogan really who he says he is, or is he really anti-Israel or anti-Semitic?" said Rifat Bali, an independent researcher who has written about the Turkish Jewish community. □

ISRAEL'S ARAB MINORITY**Since intifada, coexistence groups say they're needed more than ever***By Jessica Steinberg*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In the two years since the Palestinian intifada erupted, Arab-Jewish coexistence projects in Israel have wavered and faltered — but never ceased.

If anything, those who work on finding a way for Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs to live together in peace have renewed their vision and redoubled their efforts.

Call them dreamers, consider them idealists, but they believe it is the only way out of the current quagmire.

"I want working solutions that represent the future of Jewish-Arab relations," says Mohammed Darawshe, a former leader of the Democratic Arab Party and currently the public relations director of Givat Haviva, a coexistence educational campus near Hadera. "We need to find a model for the Middle East. It's possible, but very difficult."

No one is denying that it's a tough time for the local coexistence industry: It's hard to find tourists willing to travel to Israel to visit or support coexistence projects, and nearly impossible to move beyond the basic issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yet the interest in promoting such projects is still there. While government funding has fallen, funds from foundations, Jewish federations and private donors outside Israel — funneled through the Jewish Agency for Israel and earmarked for 25 projects — have increased since the intifada began in September 2000.

In 2000, for example, \$207,000 was allocated to Arab-Jewish projects. The figure doubled to \$410,000 in 2001, and rose to \$456,000 in 2002.

Around 10 percent to 15 percent of the Israeli population participates in coexistence programs each year, said Batya Kallus, director of grants at the Abraham Fund, a not-for-profit organization that promotes coexistence. She also estimated that close to \$10 million a year — from the European Union, Israeli government ministries and American Jewish fund-raising efforts — is funneled into coexistence programs.

Givat Haviva operates on a \$4 million annual budget, \$2 million of which comes from public and private sources in the United States and Europe. About 3 percent of its budget comes from Israel's Education Ministry, down from 20 percent before Israel's current economic crisis.

Still, projects continue to grow and even flourish. To date there are more than 100 coexistence programs in Israel.

The number hasn't fallen since October 2000, when Israeli Arab riots in solidarity with the intifada shook the Jewish majority to its core. For their part, many Arabs argue that the strong police response — 13 rioters were shot dead — shows the establishment's indifference to Arab life.

Arabs, who represent about 16 percent of the Israeli population, are especially numerous in the Negev, in and around Jerusalem, in Haifa and the Galilee, and in the Triangle.

In each region, coexistence takes place both formally, through programs and organizations, and casually. One recent day, for example, a group of Arab high school students on a school trip listened quietly to a description of a Jewish revolt at the ancient synagogue of Gamla on the Golan Heights, then trekked off to see the site's waterfall.

During olive-picking season, Israeli Arab women can be seen plucking hard green olives off squat trees in downtown Jerusalem, while cars inch by during early morning traffic.

"We all live here, in the city, in the country," describes Suleiman Assi, the Arab mayor of Kfar Bara, a small Arab town in the center of Israel. "There are work issues and social issues, issues of freedom and democracy. But we have to make it work because this is all we have."

On Givat Haviva's sprawling campus, established in 1949 as the national educational center for the Kibbutz Artzi Federation, Jewish and Arab teens recently finished building a mud hut to use as a type of coexistence clubhouse.

Elsewhere on the campus, Arab women learn computer skills in an ongoing course with instructors from Haifa's Technion — Israel Institute of Technology, and Jewish adults study Arabic in an intensive eight-month course.

Part of Givat Haviva's goal is to shape and train the next generation's leaders. Like many other coexistence projects, the center's activities are based on a mix of education and idealism.

A similar concept is used to educate and mold the 123 Jewish and Arab students, from kindergarten through fourth grade, who attend the Jerusalem Bilingual School.

Bilingual skills form a major component of the school curriculum, but what most attracts parents is the educational opportunities of a multicultural school in a city that is holy to several religions.

The question, or challenge, is whether these programs can effect real change in the way Arabs and Jews view each another.

For the coexistence professionals, the answer is yes: They are diehard optimists who have been in the field long enough to be pragmatic about Israel's long-term options as a Jewish country with a growing Arab population.

Many believe that a binational "state of all its citizens," rather than a Jewish state, is the only solution for Israel's future.

"We talk about everything out loud," including the idea of a binational state, "even though many Israeli Jews don't want to hear about it," said Sarah Ozack-Lazar, co-director of Givat Haviva's Jewish-Arab Center for Peace. "We have to deal with alternatives because we all know it's bad the way it is now."

They operate according to a simple formula: Recognize our differences, honor them and find common ground.

"The more difficult the situation, the more challenging our work becomes," said Dan Pattir, chief operating officer for the Abraham Fund. "There is an accumulation of fear, frustration for Jews and disenchantment for Arabs."

Founded in 1989, the fund supports some 300 coexistence projects each year, and in all has given more than \$8 million to some 600 projects. The number of proposals the fund entertains is growing, up 20 percent in 2002, according to Pattir.

The fear and disenchantment on both sides clearly predates the intifada. Jews have become accustomed to living with and among Israeli Arabs; but they shy away from hearing Israeli Arabs increasingly describe themselves as Palestinians.

Israeli Arabs find themselves frustrated by their second-class status in Israel and the physical and psychological barriers that impede their success.

Despite their growing identification as Palestinians — and an increasing number of incidents in which Israeli Arabs have helped Palestinian terrorists — few seem willing to give up the political and economic benefits of Israeli citizenship. □