



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel: Prague may be attacked

Israel said it received intelligence warning of plans by Al-Qaida to attack Jewish targets in Prague. An Israeli security source said Israel had received a "specific warning" about an attack, but provided no further details.

A spokeswoman for Czech police told Reuters that Israel has not officially informed Czech authorities about the possibility of an attack and that no special security measures have been taken so far.

Prague is a popular destination for Jewish tourists. Its centuries-old Jewish Quarter attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Hillel head to lead Yeshiva U.

Hillel President Richard Joel was named president of Yeshiva University in New York.

Yeshiva's Board of Trustees also voted Dec. 5 to name Joel chief executive officer of its rabbinical school, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. [Page 1]

Kenya police to issue photos

Kenyan police said they plan to release photos of two suspects wanted in connection with the Nov. 28 attacks on Israeli targets there.

Police do not yet have names for the suspects, but plan to use the photos to appeal to the public for information.

In another development, Al-Qaida again claimed responsibility for the attack and vowed more assaults on Israeli and U.S. targets.

"The Christian-Jewish alliance" will not be safe, a leading Al-Qaida member, Sulaiman Bu Ghaith, said in an audio statement aired Sunday by the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera network.

Last week, a Web site believed to represent Al-Qaida said the organization is seeking to destroy Israel. U.S. officials said they believed that the Web site, www.mojahedoon.net, indeed speaks for the terrorist group, The Washington Post reported.

The site also announced the formation of a new branch of the terrorist group, the Islamic Al-Qaida Organization in Palestine, which says it will work to undermine any Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said last week that Al-Qaida members have infiltrated Palestinian areas and Lebanon with the goal of attacking Israel.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Chosen to head Yeshiva University, Joel faces a new raft of challenges

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Students from Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life gathered one night during the recent General Assembly of the Jewish federation system and confronted Richard Joel.

The students peppered Joel, Hillel's president and international director, with criticism that events during the United Jewish Communities' annual gathering had condescended to them.

Joel — who had delivered speeches, participated in panels and spent days working the summit halls — listened intently. He expressed sympathy for the students and asked them how they would have done things differently.

For Neil Moss, the chairman of Hillel's board of directors and a longtime colleague, Joel's reaction was "warm and engaging" — typical for a corporate chief who also plays accordion, dances and sings into the wee hours at summer Hillel retreats.

"Sometimes I joke with him that he's an overgrown camp counselor," Moss says. "He's the guy who loses his voice."

Joel's voice now will resonate in a much wider arena: On Dec. 5, Joel, 52, was named president of Yeshiva University, the flagship institution of modern Orthodoxy.

His mission, Joel says, will be "to move along an institution whose job is to inspire and educate and give opportunities to a generation of young people, who will in fact lead Orthodoxy and Jewish life and the world at a time when there is a darkness of values."

He will make the transition from Hillel to Yeshiva by spring 2003, Joel says.

Joel's election capped a controversial two-year search that reflected the debate over whether to allow someone other than a Torah scholar to head the world's largest Orthodox university.

For the first time in its 116 years, Y.U. officials named neither a rabbi nor a Torah scholar, but a charismatic, popular modern Orthodox figure widely regarded for his management and fund-raising skills.

"I think he'll take an excellent institution and take it to all kinds of places we haven't dreamed about," says Barry Shrage, president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

Shrage, who also is a member of the modern Orthodox movement, predicts Joel is "going to continue to develop a vision for modern Orthodoxy that can be communicated within the community and outside of it."

For his part, Joel insists he's setting his sights strictly on the world of Yeshiva, where he once was dean of the Cardozo School of Law. He has a daughter at the school's Stern College for women and a son at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, or RIETS.

"With real humility, I've accepted the presidency of Y.U. No one has offered me the leadership of the Orthodox world," he says. It's noteworthy that he was elected during Chanukah, he adds, as his new role also is "about the kindling of lights."

Many who have worked with Joel say they're confident he'll succeed.

In part, they point to Joel's professional skills and his 14-year track record at Hillel: He took an organization of campus religious chapters loosely tied to B'nai B'rith and on the brink of financial collapse, and transformed it into a high-profile, well-funded, corporate-style entity, they say.

"He took an organization that was considered dorky and turned it around into a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Bomb wounds 2 soldiers

A roadside bomb seriously wounded two Israeli soldiers patrolling Sunday near the border with Lebanon. Israeli officials said Hezbollah was responsible, but the Shi'ite group denied involvement.

It was the first attack on Israeli troops along the border with Lebanon since August, when Hezbollah attacked an Israeli army post, killing one soldier, Reuters reported.

Hamas kidnap plans on Web

Hamas may try to kidnap soldiers to serve as bargaining chips for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, Israeli officials warned Sunday. An unofficial Hamas Internet site posted a call for members to try to abduct soldiers, Army Radio reported.

Settlement infiltration foiled

Israeli soldiers shot and killed four Palestinian gunmen who tried to infiltrate a Jewish settlement in southern Gaza on Sunday. According to Army Radio, two others escaped.

Elsewhere in Gaza, Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered the El Bureij refugee camp, site of a deadly clash last Friday in which 10 Palestinians were killed.

The main target of last Friday's Israeli incursion was Aiman Shasniyeh, who is believed to be behind a March bomb attack that killed three soldiers. Shasniyeh was not found, but his house was destroyed and his brother arrested.

P.A.: No secret talks with Sharon

A Palestinian official denied Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's claim of holding secret talks with top members of the Palestinian Authority other than Yasser Arafat.

Saeb Erekat said Sharon made the claim over the weekend as part of his election campaign and should not be taken seriously.

place kids want to be," says Lynn Schusterman, president of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, which has donated a good portion of Hillel's \$46 million annual budget.

Many involved in Hillel say Joel fueled the turnaround with his sheer magnetism. Schusterman calls Joel a "pied piper," while many cite his "charisma" in the near-reverent tones groupies reserve for rock stars.

"He has a vision for Jewish life that is very deep and compelling and profound," says Rabbi Jim Diamond, director of the Center for Jewish Life at Princeton University and of the Princeton Hillel.

"He is the total package. He has extraordinary ability in all areas — vision, speaking, people skills, management skills, creativity," adds Jay Rubin, Hillel's executive vice president.

Joel's rhetorical abilities are well-known. Rabbi Moshe Krupka, a spokesman for the Orthodox Union, says Joel "realizes the power of language in conveying ideas, in motivating people and institutions."

It was Joel who created the two key catch-phrases at the core of Hillel: "Jewish renaissance" and "maximize the number of Jews doing Jewish."

Still, some say the key is Joel's ability to marry lofty words to real strategies.

"It's not a JFK-style charisma, it's something deeper," Shrage says. "What he has is a real vision that he can articulate and bring to life. People know he's for real."

Joel is also a workhorse, many say. Seth Goldstein, now a New York University law school student, earned an Edgar Bronfman scholarship while he was a Hillel member at Cornell University, which enabled him to work as an aide to Joel for a year.

"He's nonstop; he never says no," recalls Goldstein, 24. "His days start at 6:30 a.m. and go to 2:30 a.m. I would leave him at 1:15 a.m. and he'd still be going."

Joel also served as chairman of an O.U. commission that investigated sexual harassment in the case of Rabbi Baruch Lanner. In December 2000 the panel released part of a scathing 332-page report blaming O.U. leaders for ignoring reports of Lanner's abuse and urging major organizational reforms.

At Hillel, Joel applied the kind of power-sharing leadership techniques that management gurus advocate. Colleagues speak of having "autonomy" and being allowed to "take ownership" of their work.

But he also set the bar high. "One of Richard's hallmarks was to say, 'We've done this — now what?'" Rubin says. "He strives for excellence."

"Now what?" is a good question.

The search for a new Y.U. head was so fraught with tension that it was only in the two days preceding the Dec. 5 vote that the boards of trustees for the university and RIETS appeared ready to back Joel.

Even then, it came only after Joel met with the trustees at length, face to face.

In the end, Y.U. officials arrived at an arrangement that some called surprising: Joel was named president of Yeshiva and chief executive officer of RIETS, while Y.U.'s outgoing president, Norman Lamm, a highly regarded Torah scholar, will become rosh yeshiva, or head of RIETS, and university chancellor.

Yeshiva, a top-ranked university with five locations in New York — including RIETS, medical and law schools, affiliated health-care centers and high schools — has become a "variegated" entity, according to Julius Berman, president of the RIETS board and a former president of JTA's Board of Directors.

In light of its "complex" character, Berman says, Yeshiva "requires that much more leadership." The institution will remain committed to the motto "Torah U'madda" — Torah and science — indicating a synthesis of Jewish and general studies, Berman adds.

Joel also has vowed to encourage "a more integral relationship" between different segments of the university, Berman adds.

Exactly how Yeshiva's new power structure will develop remains to be seen. Berman and others, including Joel himself, say the exact parameters of the roles Joel and Lamm will play still need be defined. But those who know Joel say he embodies what Yeshiva is about, and is deeply committed to the university's success.

A former New York assistant district attorney, Joel remains devoted to his wife and six children, reportedly never missing a Shabbat with them.

He also helped found a modern Orthodox congregation, Kemp Mill Synagogue, in his home city of Silver Spring, Md., that today includes 250 families. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israeli president visits Germany

Germany banned one protest planned during the visit of Israel's president, but will nonetheless allow neo-Nazis to demonstrate in Berlin.

The banned protest was to have taken place Sunday, when Moshe Katsav dedicated a new synagogue in the German city of Wuppertal. Katsav attended the ceremony along with German President Johannes Rau and Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

In Berlin, a neo-Nazi protest will go ahead as planned Monday, when Katsav visits there.

Security has been stepped up for the visit, and Berlin police have said they will take extra measures to ensure that clashes do not occur between right-wing extremists and counterdemonstrators.

Katsav's three-day trip also includes talks with Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, a visit to the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp and an address to the Berlin Jewish community.

Alleged war criminals alive

Australian police confirmed that nine of 22 alleged Nazi war criminals named by the Lithuanian government are still living in Australia. Last year, Lithuanian officials said the 22 had served in local police units and had been responsible for murdering thousands of Jews in Lithuania and Ukraine during World War II.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center urged both Australia and Lithuania to release the names and begin an investigation. But Efraim Zuroff, director of the center's Jerusalem office, predicted that Lithuanian and Australian authorities would not release the names. "This is a classic example of how a lack of political will has allowed these people to get away with mass murder," Zuroff said.

For years, Australia has been accused of providing a safe haven for war criminals.

Book lauds suicide bombings

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is protesting a best-selling novel by an Egyptian-Italian teen-ager it says is sympathetic to suicide bombers and incites hatred against Israel and Jews.

"Dreaming of Palestine" by 15-year-old Randa Ghazy was published in Italy earlier this year, and a French edition was recently released. French Jewish leaders are also protesting the book. Ghazy, born in Italy of immigrant Egyptian parents, tells the story of a group of Palestinian teen-agers, one of whom blows himself up and kills five Israelis. Calling the book "horrific," the Wiesenthal Center said it is "full of libelous accusations and clearly incites racist violence and validates terrorism."

Shoah memorial goes up in Latvia after fierce debate over inscription

By Adam B. Ellick

NEW YORK (JTA) — After weeks of discord over an inscription, a Holocaust memorial was unveiled in Latvia commemorating the 1941 murder of 27,000 residents of the Riga Ghetto in a nearby forest.

Following pressure from Jewish groups, the Riga municipality reversed itself and agreed to note in the monument's inscription that members of the Latvian security police participated in the slaughter.

More than 100 people, including the Latvian president and prime minister, gathered Nov. 29 for the unveiling at the mass murder site in Rumbala, located on the outskirts of Riga.

Initially, municipal officials had wanted only a brief inscription that read, "Here, over 25,000 prisoners of the Riga Ghetto were shot in a campaign organized by the Nazis."

The Latvian Jewish community refused to take part in the ceremony until the inscription was amended to reflect Latvians' participation in the slaughter.

The clash caught the attention of international organizations and sparked fervent discussions in the Latvian media.

Such debate is old news in Latvia, which had the highest rate of Nazi collaboration in Europe and has struggled to confront its Holocaust history since gaining independence from Soviet rule in 1991.

After an emergency meeting, the Riga City Monument Council gave in to the demands.

The final inscription — in English, German, Hebrew and Latvian — reads: "Here in the forest of Rumbala on November 30 and December 8 of 1941, the Nazis and their local collaborators shot dead more than 25,000 Jews — the prisoners of the Riga Ghetto — children, women, old people, as well as around 1,000 Jews deported from Germany. In the summer of 1944 hundreds of Jewish men from the concentration camp 'Riga-Kaiserwald' were killed here."

U.S. Ambassador Brian Carlson was among those who addressed the crowd at the Nov. 29 ceremony.

"The eyewitnesses and the historians agree on what happened. In the Rumbala forest on Nov. 30 and Dec. 8, 1941, 1,700 executioners murdered more than 25,000 Jews," he said.

"Of those 1,700 killers, between 1,000 and 1,500 were residents of Latvia" who worked for the security police," and "some 100 were Latvian ghetto guards," Carlson added.

Carlson also devoted a portion of his speech to express his disappointment in Latvian society today.

"Some people say that not all the Latvians were there voluntarily. Some say nothing done in those times under Nazi occupation was 'voluntary,'" he said.

"Some say those were complicated times. Some say that we should forget about the Latvian participation.

"It is uncanny that some people are adopting the Nuremberg defense used by the Nazis at their postwar trial," he continued.

"They, too, denied responsibility for their actions, saying they were 'just following orders.'"

He added, "How sad that anyone in today's free and democratic Latvia would excuse this kind of crime by saying 'it was a complicated time' or the executioners were not 'volunteers.'"

The Simon Wiesenthal Center expressed its "deep relief" that an agreement was reached to change the inscription.

Efraim Zuroff, director of the center's Jerusalem office, said "it is extremely upsetting, to put it mildly, that such a debate could even take place in a country which has been invited to join NATO."

The memorial was financed by donations from Latvia, Israel, the United States and Germany, as well as private individuals. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Bush's new man on Middle East, Elliott Abrams, is a familiar figure*By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Jewish leaders plan their first meeting with the National Security Council's new director for the Middle East, there will be little need for introduction: The American Jewish world knows Elliott Abrams and — possibly more importantly — Abrams knows them.

Named last week as the NSC's senior director for Near East and South Asian affairs, Abrams is a familiar face in the Jewish world for his work on Soviet Jewry and issues of international religious freedom.

Abrams, 54, also made headlines for pleading guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress as part of the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration.

But he may be best known to Jewish leaders as an opponent of Jewish secularism, primarily in his book "Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in Christian America," published in 1997.

The book's thesis — written while Abrams was president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington — was that American Jews must return to their religious faith to combat their shrinking numbers.

Intermarriage and secularism have hurt the American Jewish community, he wrote, and a revitalization of the religious aspects of Jewish life is needed to turn the tide.

"The community must shift energy from its efforts to promote a secular society and to ensure that individual Jews can succeed in America, and focus instead on the goals of sustaining Judaism here," Abrams wrote.

American Jews must take more lessons from the Orthodox community, which has been able to sustain itself by its "adherence to ritual and their educational network" its separation from American society at large, Abrams wrote.

Abrams, who declined interview requests from JTA, describes himself in the book as a "somewhat observant Conservative Jew."

His political work began in the 1970s for two Democratic U.S. senators. He later joined the Reagan administration as assistant secretary of state for international organizational affairs.

He then led the State Department's Office of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, and then the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

As the Reagan administration's Latin American envoy, Abrams was considered the chief advocate of military support for the Nicaraguan Contras, despite a ban on aid to the group.

In 1991, Abrams admitted to withholding from congressional committees his knowledge that Lt. Col. Oliver North was assisting the Contras militarily. He pled guilty to the two misdemeanor counts, but later was pardoned by the first President Bush.

Jewish leaders have dealt with Abrams in all of his various government capacities. He worked with them on Soviet Jewry issues while in humanitarian affairs, on issues regarding Israel and the United Nations during his tenure in the international organizations branch, and in promoting Jewish communities in South and Central America during while in the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

Many Jewish leaders are thrilled that a man so knowledgeable about the Jewish community has been appointed to such a promi-

nent position — essentially, the White House's point man on the Middle East.

"We certainly hope his knowledge and expertise about American Jewry will play a part, and will be sought," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

Abrams is expected to play a large role, together with the U.S. national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, in guiding Middle East policy at a crucial time.

Concern has been mounting that the administration could veer off the course Bush set forth in a landmark June 24 speech that called for new Palestinian leaders uncompromised by terrorism and the establishment of a Palestinian state within three years, provided the Palestinians meet certain conditions.

Recent events, including the prominent U.S. role in drafting a "road map" toward Mideast peace, have raised fears that pressure will be placed on Israel to end settlement development and withdraw its military from the West Bank, even before the Palestinians end their attacks on Israel.

That's why it's so crucial to have someone who thinks like them in a position of influence, American Jewish leaders say.

"Clearly, there's a benefit to having a guy in this position who understands what Israel is all about and the challenges Israel faces," one Jewish leader said.

Abrams is viewed as a strong proponent of Israel's security. Colleagues say his views are similar to those of Paul Wolfowitz, the hawkish deputy defense secretary. But while Abrams' views on the Middle East are expected to fall in line with the American Jewish community, some may find his take on Judaism controversial.

In his book, Abrams says that Jews need to accept the fact that they live in a Christian society, and adapt to it. That differs from the view, more broadly accepted in the Jewish community, that the United States should be pushed toward more secular values.

"He takes a much more conservative line on religion-and-state issues that puts him at odds with much of the Jewish establishment," one Jewish leader remarked.

David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said Abrams' call to minimize the social justice aspect of Jewish life in favor of religious doctrine runs counter to the American Jewish community's experience and teachings.

However, he praises Abrams as a thinker and foreign policy expert.

"His book added to an important discourse of Jewish life, but his formulation was very off-base," said Saperstein, who served on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which Abrams chaired from 2000 to 2001.

Harris said the book was just one perspective on a problem of growing importance to the Jewish community.

"I don't think these views are generally controversial," Harris said. "There's a growing recognition that American Jews, in order to flourish and prosper, need to become more knowledgeable about their heritage."

In addition, many in the Jewish community note that Abrams was not hired to serve as a liaison to the Jewish world, but to craft policy for the Middle East.

Abrams' appointment is still deemed controversial because of his Iran-Contra background. On Dec. 4, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer defended Abrams' hiring, saying Bush views him as a warrior of democracy. "Obviously, he was hired by this administration because of the outstanding work he has done for our country," Fleischer said. □