

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

2 Israelis killed in Hebron ambush

Two Israelis were killed in a Palestinian shooting attack Thursday near Hebron. The two, a man and a woman, were shot at close range as they were walking between Kiryat Arba and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

The attack took place near the site of a Nov. 15 ambush in which Palestinian gunmen killed 12 Israelis.

Bush signs faith-based orders

President Bush signed executive orders expanding his faith-based initiative. The changes Bush outlined in a speech Thursday in Philadelphia include allowing religious organizations to receive federal contracts even if they refuse to grant employment for people of other faiths.

The executive orders also allow religious groups to receive federal disaster aid, an issue that was raised when the Seattle Hebrew Academy was denied aid when it was damaged in a powerful earthquake in 2001.

The reforms have been praised by the Orthodox community, but most Jewish groups are wary of increasing the role of faith-based organizations in social services.

They fear that the Bush administration's effort to increase partnerships between the federal government and religious institutions may erode the separation between church and state. [Page 3]

Carter: Bush partial toward Israel

President Carter accused President Bush of siding with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians.

"Until President Bush, every president, Democratic or Republican, has in my opinion played a balancing role as a trusted mediator," Carter said during a speech Thursday to students in Uppsala, Sweden. "Now, though, it seems obvious that the present administration in Washington is completely compatible with the Israeli government and they have completely ignored" the Palestinian Authority.

Carter, who accepted the Nobel Peace Prize earlier this week, also said he is willing to mediate peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians, but only if they and the U.S. government ask him to, according to The Associated Press. He gave no indication, however, that he had been asked to mediate.

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

In land of music and guns, Jews thrive but need more space

By Lev Krichevsky

IZHEVSK, Russia (JTA) — To find the Jewish community center in this eastern Russian city is a challenge — even if you have the address.

The reason: The center is located inside a cramped and busy shopping mall, past the kiosks selling consumer goods.

It wasn't supposed to be this way.

When a local businessman bought a Soviet-era hotel a few years ago, the plan was to turn it into prime office space. The building stands on one of the town's central squares, across from the main Russian Orthodox cathedral.

The Jewish community jumped at the opportunity.

"We were the first tenants here," says Mark Goldin, the Jewish community leader.

But turning the building into a shopping center turned out to be more profitable, and now the Jewish community's sign in Hebrew, Russian and English hangs next to a stall where women's fur hats are hawked.

The Jewish center that services the region's estimated 1,000 Jews is home to many of the same Jewish communal activities that can be found these days throughout the Soviet Union.

In addition to community offices, the four rooms — all in less than 500 square feet — house the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee-funded Hesed welfare organization, the local religious congregation, Hillel, a library, a computer class, a Jewish Agency for Israel office, and others.

The small Jewish center doesn't seem to bother the mall's employees or shoppers, though security guards at the mall's entrance didn't look overly happy when letting Jewish visitors into the empty building on a Friday night after the mall was closed.

Izhevsk, a city of 650,000 people, is the capital of Udmurtia, an autonomous Russian republic about the size of the state of Vermont.

The indigenous population is now a minority, and most of the republic's 1.6 million residents speak Russian.

For many Russians the names of two famous men come to mind when Izhevsk or Udmurtia are mentioned.

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, one of Russia's greatest composers, was born and raised in Votkins, a town 40 miles north of Izhevsk.

Udmurtia's most famous living citizen is Mikhail Kalashnikov, the designer of the world's most popular automatic rifles.

Kalashnikov, 80, still lives in Izhevsk, whose economy is largely based on an armaments industry that was able to withstand a decade of dramatic economic changes in Russia.

Izhevsk was built around its ironworks, which dates back to the 18th century. But it was not until the 1920s that the large industrial settlement, located 700 miles east of Moscow, became a city.

Almost everything the city is known for today — from Kalashnikov rifles to motorcycles and cars — is manufactured at Izhmash, the city's major employer.

Archival records show that the first Jews settled in Izhevsk in the early 20th century. The number of Jews grew during World War II due to the influx of evacuees and refugees from other parts of the USSR.

During Soviet times, many Jews worked as engineers and managers at the Izhmash

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel to keep Patriots

Israel will keep two Patriot missile batteries that arrived this week from the United States.

The two batteries arrived for a joint exercise that Israeli officials said had been planned two years ago. Israel says it needs the Patriot anti-missile systems to help provide a defense shield against a possible Iraqi attack.

Katsav meets with pope

Israel's president told the pope that the army would make every effort to withdraw from Bethlehem before Christmas. Moshe Katsav met separately at the Vatican on Thursday with Pope John Paul II and the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

An Israeli statement called the meeting with John Paul — the first ever between an Israeli head of state and a pope at the Vatican — "warm and cordial." A Vatican spokesman said the Holy See reiterated its position backing the "existence of and collaboration between" two separate Israeli and Palestinian states. Katsav is on a three-day visit to Italy that ends Friday.

Parents eye Israeli security

A group of North American parents came to Israel this week to check out the security situation before sending their children on United Synagogue Youth programs.

During the advance trip, the parents were to meet with government officials and representatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Israel against missile sales

Israel launched an international campaign to limit the sale of shoulder-launched missiles. The initiative was launched after the failed Nov. 28 attempt to down an Israeli charter plane in Kenya, an attack later claimed by Al-Qaida, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Thursday.

plant. "These people's children and grandchildren make up the Jewish community," says Goldin, the community leader.

Boris Fisher, like his father before him, was a member of the Communist Party and an engineer whose professional life was connected with the Kalashnikov rifle.

He says that for most of his life, he had neither Jewish knowledge nor a desire to explore his Judaism.

But after the fall of communism, Fisher's friend Goldin asked him to lead the congregation — and Fisher agreed.

Today the congregation called Aliyah holds weekly services in a room that on different days is used by other Jewish interest groups.

With the nearest rabbi hundreds of miles away, the congregation and its leader have mostly relied on themselves in rebuilding Jewish religious life in the city.

"We started with collective readings of weekly Torah portions. After two years, I realized" that we needed to run it more like a regular service, Fisher, 64, says.

On a recent Saturday morning, a dozen men and women, most in their 60s and 70s, gathered for prayer in their improvised synagogue.

Facing Jerusalem — in this case the window with a table and a refrigerator next to it — people were silently reading from the Russian translations of the prayers that the leader was telling them to read.

The community doesn't have a Torah scroll, and none of the congregation's members can read Hebrew fluently.

"We will now be reciting the Shema," Fisher addressed his congregants. "Please do it in Hebrew, just a few words."

Earlier this year, the community held a Bat Mitzvah and brit milah ceremonies, the first Jewish religious ceremonies in Izhevsk in decades.

Fisher says these public events marked a breakthrough for the entire Jewish community.

"People saw that everything is possible now. The old fears die hard and some still prefer to remain quiet about their Jewishness through sheer inertia," he says.

"As Jews, we are still like small children," said Yakov Erusalimsky, a 71-year old retired railroad manager. "Perhaps we don't know much yet, but I think we sincerely want to learn."

Like Jewish communities elsewhere in Russia, Izhevsk's Jews are overwhelmingly elderly. Each year about 50 Jews, mainly younger ones, leave for Israel and other countries.

But Mikhail Zbar, 26 and until recently the leader of Izhevsk Hillel, says many younger Jews who can find good jobs locally are not planning to emigrate.

As with their parents, a good job for the younger generation is very likely to be connected with Izhmash. Zbar works as sales manager at the plant's car manufacturing sector.

Ten years passed since Goldin, the pioneer of Jewish rebirth in Izhevsk, started a society of Jewish culture that has gradually become a full-fledged community.

Since then, Jewish life has become substantial enough in Izhevsk that this small community has not been spared from the ongoing controversy between the two major umbrella groups of Russian Jewry — even though Izhevsk is home to a community that often doesn't have the 10 Jewish men for a single minyan has two separate Orthodox congregations.

While there is little internal squabbling in Izhevsk, Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar's Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia runs a minyan that congregates in a different location.

Another chief rabbi, Adolph Shayevich, and his Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations provide guidance for the Aliyah congregation that gathers at the Jewish community center.

The few rooms that the Jewish center rents are not enough for the growing number of community programs.

Goldin says he dreams of the day when the Jewish community will move into a building of its own.

He has found only one local Jewish donor so far, and a first donation of \$3,000 has recently settled into the community's special account.

"We could have done so much more if we had a proper space," Goldin says. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Mormons renew vow to Jews

The Mormon Church again committed itself to end the practice of posthumously baptizing Jews. Church officials made the promise at a meeting Tuesday in New York, according to Ernest Michel, chairman of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors, who attended the meeting. The church made a similar vow seven years ago.

U.S. to stress democratization

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out plans for democratizing the Middle East. In an address Thursday to a Washington think tank, Powell unveiled the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative, which aims at economic, political and educational reform among Muslim and Islamic countries in the region.

"Any approach to the Middle East that ignores its political, economic and educational underdevelopment will be built upon sand," Powell said. "It is time to lay a firm foundation of hope." The project will initially cost \$29 million, with additional funding sought next year from Congress. In another development, a State Department official said the initiative will likely include plans to reform Palestinian textbooks, which are filled with anti-Israel rhetoric.

Friedman named econ. adviser

President Bush tapped Stephen Friedman as his next economic adviser. Friedman, who is a prominent figure in the New York Jewish community, is a former chairman of Goldman Sachs and currently a senior principal at Marsh & McLennan Capital Inc.

He replaces Larry Lindsay in the senior advisory post, which does not require congressional approval.

Jews protest Assad visit

British Jews are protesting Syrian President Bashar Assad's planned visit to Britain next week. In a letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Board of Deputies of British Jews said Syria has "one of the world's worst human rights records" and that Assad has "repeatedly rejected offers to normalize relations with Israel."

In addition to lunching with Blair during the three-day visit, Assad is also slated to meet with Queen Elizabeth.

Blair hopes to use the visit to draw Syria into the anti-Iraq coalition and gauge sentiment for a resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace talks, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Spielberg to help terror victims

Director Steven Spielberg reportedly plans to donate \$1 million from his Holocaust foundation to five organizations that help Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorist attacks, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported.

President's faith-based initiative draws fire and praise from Jews

By Joshua Runyan
Philadelphia Jewish Exponent

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Several Jewish groups reacted with "alarm" and "serious disappointment" to President Bush's executive orders issued Thursday that expands federal funding for faith-based groups.

But Orthodox groups hailed them as an important step forward.

In announcing his faith-based initiative here on Tuesday, Bush said the order is intended to correct what he called the "discrimination of religious charities by the federal government."

At a conference sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Bush signed an executive order directing "all federal agencies to follow the principle of equal treatment in awarding social-service grants."

"If a charity is helping the needy, it should not matter if there is a rabbi on the board, or a cross or a crescent on the wall," Bush told the multiethnic crowd gathered at the Philadelphia Marriott hotel.

"The days of discriminating against religious groups just because they are religious are coming to an end."

Since the early days of his presidential campaign, Bush has called for federal funding of faith-based social service programs.

But the office of faith-based initiatives, which the president created when he took office last year, has had a rocky beginning.

Critics, including most Jewish groups, view the initiative as a violation of the separation of church and state.

Its first director, University of Pennsylvania professor John DiIulio Jr. quit after less than eight months at the post, citing difficulty in getting measures to help religious charities passed in Congress.

Now, instead of seeking congressional approval of his policies in this arena — where he encountered resistance — the president has decided to implement changes to the federal government through executive orders.

"I will continue to work with Congress on this agenda, but the needs of our country are urgent and, as president, I have an authority I intend to use," Bush said.

"Many acts of discrimination against faith-based groups are committed by executive-branch agencies. As leader of the executive branch, I'm going to make some changes, effective today."

Bush's order directs federal agencies to take steps to ensure that all policies are consistent with equal-treatment principles.

Specifically, the action ensures that no organization applying for grants will be discriminated against based on religion, and that no beneficiary of federally funded social services may be discriminated against based on religion.

In his speech, Bush accused the Federal Emergency Management Agency of having "a history of discrimination against faith-based groups."

"It will revise its policy on emergency relief so that religious nonprofit groups can qualify for assistance after disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes," Bush assured the crowd.

It was a promise that the Orthodox Union welcomed.

According to the organization, after a severe earthquake two years ago, the Seattle Hebrew Academy in Washington state was denied emergency funds from FEMA because of the school's religious affiliation.

"We are gratified" that Bush endorsed "the principle of government neutrality towards religion as opposed to government hostility towards religion," said Nathan Diamant, director of the organization's Institute for Public Affairs.

But most Jewish groups objected to Tuesday's announcement.

The Anti-Defamation League expressed serious concern that the orders will "allow taxpayer dollars to fund job discrimination and proselytizing."

Jewish groups objected most vehemently to the provision that allows religion to be taken into account when hiring for a government-funded position. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Debate over German aid to Israel fueled by possible transfer of tanks

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Israel is no closer to getting the tanks it has requested from Germany, despite the warm welcome Israeli President Moshe Katsav received this week in Berlin.

During a meeting Monday with Katsav, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said Germany will soon deliver the Patriot missile batteries Israel has requested.

Germany considers the batteries a defensive weapon in case of an Iraqi missile attack on Israel. But many German officials consider the Fuchs tanks offensive weapons, and are concerned that Israel may use them against Palestinians.

Katsav, who made a three-day visit to Germany this week on the invitation of German President Johannes Rau, confirmed Tuesday that Schroeder would not commit to delivery of the tanks during their meeting.

Schroeder and Katsav reportedly discussed the possible delivery of additional German military technology to Israel.

Neither Katsav nor Schroeder elaborated on what that technology might be, but Schroeder told reporters he was prepared to help Israel on the basis of German law.

Much has been made in recent days of the German law prohibiting the delivery of weapons to war zones. Protesters from across the political spectrum have cited this law to argue that Israel should not receive the German tanks.

The debate is emblematic of a tougher attitude toward Israel in today's Germany, 58 years after the end of the Holocaust.

The generation that supported Israel out of a sense of guilt over the Holocaust — or out of a feeling that the former victims are guiltless — has been replaced by one with a sense of responsibility to prevent war and genocide in general.

In addition, the old one-sided, positive view of Israel has been replaced among some Germans by a one-sided, negative view.

Observers say such sentiments sometimes generate statements that relativize the Holocaust, turning the Nazis' former victims into persecutors of Palestinians — a position the German government rejects. Most German politicians stress the country's special relationship with Israel, and Germany is Israel's second biggest economic partner after the United States.

But German politicians are also subject to pressure from the decidedly pro-Palestinian European Union, which is seeking to define its role in the world political arena.

Current German policy toward Israel and the Palestinian Authority resembles the "constructive engagement" model generally reserved for putting pressure on trouble-making regimes.

Germany long has sold weapons to Israel. But in early 2002, as a national election campaign was about to begin, politicians across the spectrum indicated that they were under pressure from constituents to justify continued weapons sales to Israel — portrayed by German media as the aggressor against the Palestinians — and to end the tradition of unconditional support for the Jewish state.

The current discussion emerged after news broke in mid-November that Israel had renewed its request for Germany's surplus Patriot missiles. An Israeli Defense Ministry spokeswoman said in late November that the request was made some time ago,

after Israel learned that Germany intended to withdraw the Patriot batteries from possible use.

On Dec. 4, a spokesperson for the Israeli Embassy in Berlin confirmed that Israeli officials had met with German officials and had been assured that the Patriots would be provided.

Schroeder subsequently confirmed his approval, based on Germany's commitment to "do everything to guarantee Israel's security." □

U.S., German lawmakers hear concern over rise in anti-Semitism

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish leaders are pushing the White House and Congress to take a firmer stance against European anti-Semitism.

A group of German and American lawmakers heard Tuesday from Jewish leaders who expressed concern about the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe.

The Jewish leaders also suggested ways to combat anti-Semitism in states that participate in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

"Many European Jews today feel more vulnerable, disillusioned and frightened than at any time since the Holocaust," said Ambassador Alfred Moses, past president of the American Jewish Committee and a former U.S. ambassador to Romania. "I know from my personal experience that anti-Semitism is never far below the surface in Central and Eastern Europe."

The Anti-Defamation League presented a series of recommendations on combating the problem, including urging political leaders to speak out against bigotry, strengthening administrative, legal and monitoring instruments and using educational initiatives.

"While the last century witnessed the most heinous results of bigotry unchecked, fortunately we also have witnessed in our lifetime powerful examples of how strong U.S. and German leadership have brought about dramatic change," said Kenneth Jacobson, ADL's associate national director.

"America and Germany, each having learned painful lessons from their respective past experiences with the danger of bigotry, are uniquely positioned to lead the OSCE to a new level of activism against anti-Semitism," he said.

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a government agency that monitors the OSCE and is made up of 18 U.S. lawmakers.

The visit to Washington by the German lawmakers was a follow-up to a July session in Berlin on anti-Semitism.

Moses noted that incidents of anti-Semitism have risen in Europe because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel's ties to the United States and the momentum that right-wing groups have been gaining in some European countries.

Israel Singer, an official with the World Jewish Congress, also testified before the lawmakers.

U.S. and German lawmakers signed a letter of intent to strengthen their work against anti-Semitism, use educational initiatives and urge other parliaments to follow their lead.

"It shows the seriousness with which the American and German legislatures are addressing the issues of anti-Semitism," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia. □