



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.N. condemns Kenya attacks

Israel applauded the U.N. Security Council for passing a resolution condemning the Nov. 28 terror attacks on Israeli targets in Kenya.

"The Security Council has never before adopted a resolution that so clearly condemns the terrorist killing of Israelis or Jews," Israel's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Aaron Jacob, told *The New York Times*.

The executive director of the American Jewish Committee, David Harris, called the resolution "a diplomatic and psychological breakthrough."

He was quoted as telling the *Times*, "After 54 years of Israel's existence, the U.N. Security Council, with American leadership, has finally acknowledged that the loss of Jewish lives in terrorist attacks warrants condemnation."

The resolution passed last Friday by a 14-1 vote. Syria cast the sole dissenting vote.

Arafat to bin Laden: Butt out

Yasser Arafat called on Osama bin Laden to stop using the Palestinian cause as a reason for Al-Qaida's terror activities.

In an interview with the *London Sunday Times*, Arafat said bin Laden is exploiting Palestinian suffering to garner support in the Arab world.

"Why is bin Laden talking about Palestine now? Bin Laden never, not ever, stressed this issue, he never helped us, he was working in another completely different area and against our interests," Arafat was quoted as saying.

Arafat barred from Bethlehem

Yasser Arafat will not be allowed to attend Christmas mass in Bethlehem.

Because of ongoing Palestinian terrorism, Israeli officials will not allow the Palestinian Authority president to leave his Ramallah compound for the mass, Israel's Cabinet decided Sunday.

The army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, told the Cabinet that because of continued terror warnings the army does not plan to withdraw from the city.

President Moshe Katsav told Pope John Paul II at the Vatican last week that Israel would make every effort to withdraw its troops from Bethlehem before Christmas.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

New agents to handle refugees could help Jews from FSU, Iran

By Mica Rosenberg

NEW YORK (JTA) — The deployment of specially trained immigration agents abroad should help Jewish refugees and others hoping to enter the United States, immigration advocates say.

The decision to send the agents abroad came last month, just days before the creation of the new Department of Homeland Security, which will incorporate the Immigration and Naturalization Service and 21 other agencies under one umbrella.

On Nov. 22, INS Commissioner James Ziglar faxed a memo to his field offices outlining the creation of a specialized "Refugee Corps." The agency will deploy immigration agents to strategic locations abroad, where they will deal exclusively with the unique problems of refugees.

While Jews make up only a small minority of the refugees trying to enter the United States, the move could help some Jews from the former Soviet Union and Iran who have faced difficulties and delays in the processing of their asylum requests.

Refugee admissions generally go up when handled by agents who have special training in the field.

Ziglar also sent a copy of his directive to Leonard Glickman, chairman of Refugee Council USA — made up of 19 refugee advocacy groups — and president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, one of the oldest immigrant resettlement agencies in the United States.

HIAS praised Ziglar's move, saying it had been pushing for precisely this type of program for several years.

"This is probably one of the most important initiatives that Ziglar took before he left office," Glickman said. "On the macro level, it will have a massive impact" on refugee processing, and there are those in the new Department of Homeland Security who are committed to it.

Mark Hetfield, director of international operations at HIAS, pointed to a 1999 letter the organization drafted suggesting that the INS adopt a Refugee Corps modeled after the successful Asylum Corps. The Asylum Corps was created in 1990 because of INS officials' inability to deal with the special needs of asylum seekers living in the United States.

According to Ziglar's directive, the proposed Refugee Corps will have headquarters in Washington, with refugee officers posted overseas to conduct interviews and settle asylum claims.

"By having a small group of trained overseas adjudicators, there will be an increase in approvals, more credibility" for the program, and "more attention paid to refugees and humanitarian efforts," Glickman said.

Kim Weissman, an INS spokeswoman, was surprised to hear of the commissioner's last-minute memo, saying there is confusion within the agency because of its impending transfer to the Homeland Security Department.

Ziglar had long expressed his commitment to the issue of refugees, Weissman said. But refugee processing experienced delays in the wake of Sept. 11, when admissions were brought to a complete halt for several months because of security reasons.

As a result of this, hundreds of Jews from the former Soviet Union waiting in Moscow, and some 140 Iranian Jews stranded in Vienna, experienced delays in the processing of their asylum requests. Record-low refugee admissions were reported for

MIDEAST FOCUS

'Road map' put on hold

The Bush administration told European leaders it will not adopt a "road map" for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the coming days.

French President Jacques Chirac and other European leaders were urging the United States to unveil the plan when the leaders of the "Quartet" — the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia — meet in Washington on Friday, The New York Times reported. The Bush administration has chosen to wait until after Israeli elections next month.

Labor may alter Jerusalem plank

Israel's Labor Party is reportedly considering dropping a reference to "united Jerusalem" from its platform. A draft of the election platform drawn up by a party committee states that only "the Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem" constitute Israel's capital, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported.

The draft, which is to be submitted for party approval soon, also does not discuss the question of control over holy sites in the city, the paper said.

Mofaz travels to United States

Israel's defense minister left Saturday night for high-level talks in Washington and New York.

Shaul Mofaz was slated to meet with Bush administration officials to discuss preparations and coordination for a possible U.S. attack on Iraq. He was also scheduled to meet with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in New York.

Likud probed for alleged bribery

Israel's attorney general told police to probe allegations of vote buying and other corruption in the recent Likud Party primaries. Elyakim Rubinstein said Saturday that he had urged police to conclude the investigation before elections are held on Jan. 28.

fiscal year 2002, when slightly more than 27,000 of the 70,000 refugees authorized for entry were admitted.

The Jews in Vienna, along with other persecuted religious minorities from Iran, were held up in Austria for nine months while waiting for security clearance to enter the United States.

About half of the 140 were granted asylum, leaving 70 people in limbo.

In all, about 530 Iranians were denied refugee status, including a handful of Jews.

Weissman said Ziglar sent volunteer refugee officers abroad last February in response to the delay in admissions. The new Refugee Corps may be a way to institutionalize this extra effort.

The Refugee Corps should ensure the presence of a well-trained, dedicated staff focused exclusively on the management of refugees. Backers say it would be a vast improvement over temporarily assigned immigration officials, who often make critical decisions about entry into the United States with little preparation.

First priority will be given to those designated by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees as the neediest cases. Next will come groups of special interest to the United States, including Jews and evangelical Christians from the former Soviet Union and the Iranians trapped in Vienna, as well as Somali Bantu living in Kenya and persecuted Bahais.

Third priority will be certain family reunion cases, Hetfield said.

In 1990, the Lautenberg Amendment established that Soviet Jews were likely targets of persecution, thus making it easier for them to apply for refugee status. Since they are officially protected by the State Department, they will continue to fare well under the new corps, Hetfield said.

In general, the number of Jews entering the United States has been steadily decreasing. HIAS assisted 46,000 Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union to enter the United States in 1992. That number dropped to just 2,293 in 2002.

An additional 267 Iranian Jews received help from HIAS this year.

But refugee advocates are still concerned that refugees from other nations could get lost in the new Homeland Security bureaucracy.

Hetfield calls the new Refugee Corps "a silver lining on a very dark cloud."

Immigrants in general, and especially refugees, should not be considered inherent threats to U.S. security, advocates say.

The department's primary mission is to "respond to any future attacks, to reduce our vulnerability and, most important, prevent the terrorists from taking innocent American lives," President Bush has said.

The American Immigration Lawyers Association wrote a resolution in September opposing the inclusion of the INS in the Homeland Security Department.

"Placing them within the department would constitute a paradigm shift of enormous consequences: Immigrants would then be viewed through the lens of terrorism and security threats," the association's board of governors said in a statement.

On June 26, Amnesty International USA testified before Congress about how a Homeland Security Department would impact refugees and asylum seekers.

If the department's main task "is to prevent the arrival of terrorists, INS inspectors will likely first look upon undocumented asylum seekers as security threats and be less likely to recognize them as people in need of protection," Amnesty officials said.

Hetfield said the Refugee Corps, as outlined in Ziglar's memo, is "just an administrative change" and does not incorporate "badly needed legal remedies" like the Refugee Protection Act, which HIAS and the Refugee Council USA have been pressing Congress to pass.

The bill would restore benefits to refugees and protect them from "expedited removal," a system used since 1997 that allows low-level INS officials and border patrol agents to decide whether to turn away refugees and asylum seekers immediately or detain them indefinitely.

The result is that refugees who have legitimate claims can be returned to dangerous situations, Hetfield said.

Few know exactly what the new corps will look like, or if it will affect current policies.

Other governmental and nongovernmental organizations, such as the State Department and the International Rescue Committee, say it is too early to tell. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Controversial novel protested

Thousands of people are heeding a call to protest sales of a novel that includes a sympathetic portrayal of a Palestinian youth who becomes a suicide bomber. After more than 30,000 people sent protest e-mails, the French publisher, Flammarion, blocked its e-mail address, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Paris. Flammarion in Canada, the center said, pulled copies of the book out of bookstores, and Canada's amazon.ca stopped selling it.

The center and the French Jewish umbrella organization CRIF launched a protest last week against "Dreaming of Palestine," a novel by Egyptian-Italian teen-ager Randa Ghazy. There were no protests when the book was originally published in Italy earlier this year.

Poll eyes German anti-Semitism

Negative attitudes toward Jews are widespread in German society today, according to a new American Jewish Committee survey.

Among its findings, the poll found that 52 percent of Germans believe that Jews are exploiting the memory of the Holocaust.

In another finding, 40 percent said Jews exert too much influence on world events.

The poll also found that 60 percent of Germans acknowledge that anti-Semitism is a problem in their country.

Miami Jewish paper closes

The Jewish Star-Times of Miami, the only Jewish newspaper published by a major daily paper in North America, went out of business. The paper was launched three years ago by the Biscayne Bay Publishing Company, a subsidiary of the Miami Herald Publishing Company, which in turn is owned by the Knight-Ridder media chain.

The closing was only the latest bad news for The Star-Times' president and publisher, Dwight Owen Schweitzer.

He was due to be arraigned Monday in county court on misdemeanor battery charges stemming from a November arrest, the Miami Herald said.

Man convicted for shul arson

A man was convicted for trying to set a Bronx synagogue on fire. Mazin Assi, 23, was found guilty Dec. 12 for the attempted October 2000 firebombing of the Conservative Synagogue Adath Israel. The attack occurred on Yom Kippur.

He faces up to 22 years in prison when he is sentenced Jan. 22. He and a second man, Mohammed Alfaqih, 21, both of Yonkers, N.Y., were tried under the state's hate crimes law. A second jury is deliberating Alfaqih's case.

Eager to dispel bad image, officials in Hungary meet with Jewish groups

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Eight months after Hungary's right-wing government was ousted, the new leadership is trying to rehabilitate the image of a country suffering from an upsurge in anti-Semitic rhetoric and incidents.

A top police official was dismissed soon after a Dec. 4 incident in which some 100 skinheads were given permission to demonstrate in a Budapest square where Jews were to celebrate the sixth night of Chanukah.

The youths chanted "Hungary is ours" and prevented the Jews, led by members of Chabad, from lighting a huge outdoor menorah.

The dismissal of the police official marks a break with recent government behavior: Former Prime Minister Viktor Orban often was criticized for keeping silent and not condemning the anti-Jewish provocations of some of his closest colleagues and allies.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Jewish community — Central Europe's largest, with 80,000 to 100,000 members — and visiting Jewish delegations have held several meetings with officials close to Prime Minister Peter Medgyessy. Such meetings were rare under Orban.

Among the topics discussed is the need to curb anti-Jewish propaganda by tightening Hungarian laws against incitement. Current laws blandly refer to racism, but do not specify Jew-hatred or — a growing phenomenon in Hungary — Holocaust denial.

Roughly 550,000 Hungarian Jews perished in the Holocaust.

Not only do such laws need to spell out anti-Semitism as a form of prejudice and bigotry, but the authorities must demonstrate a commitment to enforcing the law, says Avi Beker, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress.

Beker led a delegation of foreign and local Jews who met with officials of Hungary's Justice Ministry on Nov. 21.

WJC officials also met with Medgyessy on his first official visit to the United States last month.

The police official's dismissal, and the Jewish leaders' meetings with Hungarian authorities, "are really encouraging and a change from the previous government," Beker told JTA last week.

"They need to single out anti-Semitism because of the history of Europe, the history of Hungary and the attempt to revive anti-Semitism in Hungary," he said. "It's not enough to treat it under racism. From an educational standpoint, you have to call the sickness by its very name, otherwise you can't immunize the social system."

With Hungary trying to join the European Union, it's not only Jews in Hungary and abroad who have criticized the government: The Council of Europe's Commission Against Racism and Intolerance also warned Budapest about "latent anti-Semitism" and "coded" anti-Semitic statements in Hungarian political circles and media.

Hungarian officials long have declined to crack down on the Hungarian translation and widespread distribution of "Mein Kampf," "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and Henry Ford's "The International Jew," claiming it would violate democracy.

There also have been a number of efforts to whitewash Hungary's role in the Holocaust and commemorate various wartime figures as heroes.

Several high-profile Hungarian politicians also have hinted in recent years — occasionally on the floor of Parliament — that Jews are to blame for the crimes of communism, that Jews cause anti-Semitism, that they wield too much power in the media and that they are destroying Hungarian culture.

For example, when Hungarian Holocaust survivor Imre Kertesz recently was awarded this year's Nobel Prize for literature, many Hungarians lined up to meet him at book signings.

But some in the right-wing media complained that a "real Hungarian" hadn't won the prize.

Others reportedly e-mailed messages to the Nobel committee in Stockholm, chastising it for being duped by an international Jewish conspiracy. □

Concordia relaxes ban on Hillel, but continues to withhold money

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — Concordia University's student government has decided to remove a ban on the campus Hillel, but will continue to deny funds to the Jewish group.

The move, taken Dec. 12, appears unlikely to defuse a crisis brewing since the Concordia Student Union voted to ban Hillel earlier this month.

Hillel leaders have decided to sue if the student union doesn't apologize and reinstate the Jewish group unconditionally.

Some 100 Jewish students crowded the room at the Dec. 12 meeting of the student union, but they walked out in protest before a vote was taken on the Hillel issue.

The crisis began after a Palestinian activist complained about fliers for Mahal 2000 — a program that allows young Jews to spend several months volunteering in the Israeli army — that were distributed from Hillel's table on campus.

The student union hastily convened a meeting on Dec. 2 and — with only a third of the union's members present — voted to ban Hillel from campus and cut off its funding.

The ban followed several other incidents during the past two years that made Concordia known as a hotbed of pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel activism.

As the crisis grew, the student union decided to reinstate Hillel, on condition that the group sign a statement pledging not to distribute material that the student union found racist or otherwise offensive.

Hillel leaders voted last week to sue the student union to be reinstated without conditions.

Student union member Naomi Sarna began the Dec. 12 meeting by denouncing the union's handling of the Hillel issue. She denounced the agreement Hillel was ordered to sign as propaganda, and then led Hillel supporters in walking out of the meeting in protest.

For the next two hours, student union members offered a litany of criticism of Israel, the "racist literature" they say Hillel distributes at its table — such as a graphic of a kaffiyeh-sporting Palestinian equated to a white-hooded KKK member — and the university administration's allegedly anti-Arab, anti-Muslim stance.

Concordia's communications director, Dennis Murphy, scoffed at allegations that the administration is anti-Arab.

The anti-Israel comments at the meeting occasionally became heated.

Hillel was recruiting for an army engaged in a "colonial war," Trish McIntosh said. "Synagogues around the world are decrying" Israeli actions "as a violent, bloody event," she claimed.

"These people are recruiting for a brigade that not only built 108 settlements, but helped build more," said Laith Marouf of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights.

There were not many people left in the room to speak in defense of the Jewish state or Hillel.

The union voted 10-0 to reinstate Hillel as a student organization at Concordia, but withhold its funding until it signs the document on distributing literature.

Afterward, the president of the union, Sabine Friesinger, said

she hopes Hillel will sign the document. "I'm not sure they realize what's being asked of them," she said. "I'm giving them the time to understand."

She also said the crisis would be a learning experience for everyone concerned.

"I hope when people are asked to sign on to these principles, they start internalizing them and asking questions," she said.

Hillel is determined to stay the course and stand up for its own principles.

"As of now, we will still be continuing the legal process," said Noah Joseph, a Jewish student who cast the lone dissenting vote on Dec. 2 when the union banned Hillel. "This is a form of blackmail that they are using to force us to sign their document if we want to get our funding back. They are stealing money from us."

Murphy, the school's communications director, said the crisis over Hillel was unlike any other situation he could remember at Concordia, even the uproar when pro-Palestinian rioters caused the cancellation of a speech by former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in September.

"I am receiving about 10-15 angry e-mails per day from as far away as Florida," Murphy said.

"In the past 10 days, I have seen a tremendous outpouring of anger — and, mainly, support for Hillel and the Jewish students — much more so in the United States than in Canada. I have learned very quickly that Hillel is a group unlike any others. It is sacred and attacking it is seen as a type of heresy." □

New law may delay recovery of properties, Czech Jews fear

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Jewish communities fear that a new law could delay the return of property confiscated by the Nazis or the former Communist regime.

The communities already have been handed about two dozen state-owned properties — including cemeteries, buildings and vacant land — under a government plan to mitigate losses sustained by Jews in the former Czechoslovakia.

But they now fear fresh obstacles from a plan, due to come into effect next month, to transfer a range of state properties to regional authorities after January.

"We are very concerned that we may face the same situation we had back in 1991, when the state handed over property to municipalities and we had problems trying to get them," said Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities.

The transfer plan only concerns state-owned properties. Local authorities and private owners are not obliged to cooperate in the process.

Kraus pointed to the case of a synagogue in Kolin, which the local town hall refused to hand over because no Jews lived in the town any more. The federation also has encountered difficulties with former synagogues in Louny and Slany, which they have been unable to take over because authorities have been using them to house archives and refuse to cooperate.

The communities are urgently trying to determine how many of the 20 or so locales on the latest list of properties put forward for return will be covered by the new law. □