



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### At least 15 dead in bus attack

At least 15 people were killed and more than 30 others wounded in a suicide attack aboard a Haifa bus Wednesday.

The blast occurred at 2:20 p.m. local time as the No. 37 bus pulled away from a stop in the Carmeliya neighborhood.

"Once again, the bestial hand of Palestinian terrorism has struck at the heart of Israel," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. [Pages 1, 3]

### Israel seeks anti-bombing treaty

Israel's Foreign Ministry reportedly completed a draft of an international convention against suicide bombers.

Israel soon will begin distributing the draft to foreign governments in an effort to obtain enough signatures to make it a recognized international treaty, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The ministry's legal department plans to present the draft to Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in the coming days, the paper said.

### IDF: No missiles aimed at Israel

Iraq has not deployed missiles capable of hitting Israel, the head of Israeli military intelligence said this week.

Briefing Israeli legislators Tuesday, Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi said that while Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has missiles capable of reaching Israel, he has not deployed them in Iraq's western desert, the only area from which they could hit Israel.

Despite such comments, the spokeswoman for the Israel Defense Force said Wednesday that Israelis should purchase all supplies they need to prepare sealed rooms.

### HIAS blasts immigration limits

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society's chief blasted Bush administration moves that may limit immigration to its lowest levels in more than half a century.

With beefed-up security measures after Sept. 11 and the absorption of the Immigration and Naturalization Service into the new Department of Homeland Security, HIAS predicts that immigration will fall some 50,000 short of the 70,000-person quota set last fall, which would lead to the lowest number of arrivals in more than 60 years.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Gaza push, cease-fire talks offer mixed message on Sharon's goals

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the Israeli army mounted a major operation in this Gaza Strip this week, questions were being asked about the ability of Israel's new, right-wing government to advance the peace process with the Palestinians.

Israeli officials claim the Gaza operation actually was intended to serve a new, serious drive for a cease-fire being discussed by Israeli and Palestinian officials. Once a cease-fire is achieved, they say, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is determined to move quickly to strike a longer-term deal with the Palestinians.

But the chances of achieving a cease-fire any time soon may be reduced following a suicide bus bombing Wednesday in Haifa.

At least 15 people were killed and more than 30 others wounded in the attack.

"Once again, the bestial hand of Palestinian terrorism has struck at the heart of Israel," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Hamas issued a statement Wednesday in the Gaza Strip praising the bombing, but stopped short of claiming responsibility.

The attack came amid Israeli efforts to clamp down on Hamas operations in Gaza.

Israeli forces backed by tanks moved into Gaza's al-Bureij refugee camp on Monday after rockets were fired at the town of Sderot on the Israeli side of the border. The target was Hamas, which Israel holds responsible for the rocket attacks.

Israel argues that it can't allow Hamas to hold the people of Sderot hostage — and that, for any cease-fire to hold, the Palestinian Authority must keep Hamas and other radical organizations under control.

But Israel faces a dilemma: Since the intifada began 29 months ago, Israel's battle against terror has severely weakened the Palestinian Authority, with which it might one day be able to strike a peace deal.

At the same time, the fighting has left Hamas, which is not interested in any compromise with Israel, virtually intact — to the extent that Hamas now constitutes a real threat to the hegemony of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement in Gaza.

Israel's recent actions against Hamas, therefore, have a double goal: to protect Sderot by sending a deterrent message and to weaken Hamas's organizational structure and military capabilities.

Most of the Israel Defense Force operations in Gaza over the past month have been directed at Hamas terrorists. This week's action for the first time targeted a Hamas "political" leader, Mohammed Taha, one of the organization's co-founders, who was apprehended in the al-Bureij camp and taken into custody.

The message was clear: Israel now sees itself free to attack Hamas political leaders, including perhaps the organization's spiritual leader and co-founder, Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

Israel has been urging the Palestinian Authority to confront Hamas and force it to play by the P.A.'s rules.

Israeli officials often cite the example of the chaotic early days of Israeli statehood when, to assert the authority of the central government, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ordered the sinking of the Altalena, a Jewish ship that was bringing arms to underground Jewish militias.

In recent weeks, the Palestinian Authority instituted patrols along Gaza's northern

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Palestinian TV libels Israel

Palestinian television has come up with a new libel against Israel.

According to the Israel-based Palestinian Media Watch, Palestinian TV reported this week that Israel is making "bombs and mines designed as toys" and dropping them from airplanes in populated areas where Palestinian children play.

### Israelis oppose Palestinian state

Israelis oppose the creation of a Palestinian state by a 2-1 margin, a new poll says.

The poll, carried out last month by the Geocartography polling firm, asked, "In light of the experience that has accumulated since the Oslo agreements, do you support or oppose a Palestinian state?"

Sixty-one percent expressed opposition, while 31 percent said they support it.

### E.U. to help Palestinians

The European Union said it is donating \$15 million worth of food and cash to 337,500 Palestinians living in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the West Bank.

The Jordanian office of the European Commission said in a statement Wednesday that at least 25 percent of the donation will go for refugees in Jordan, which has the largest number of Palestinians.

### Israeli Arab needs discussed

Jewish and Arab professionals met in Nazareth this week to discuss opportunities for Arab children in Israel.

Organized by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee-Brookdale Institute's Center for Children and Youth, the two-day forum of professionals at the local and national levels was called to examine major trends and challenges in addressing the educational, social and health needs of Israeli Arab youths.



## Daily News Bulletin

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border, intercepting Hamas rocket crews and stopping them from firing.

But beyond that, Israeli officials say, there is no sign that the Palestinian Authority is willing to take on Hamas.

By hitting the organization's political and military wings, Israel hopes to weaken Hamas sufficiently to induce the Palestinian Authority to assert its authority at some point.

Yet there is something of a vicious circle in all this: The Israeli strikes have not been as surgical as the IDF would have liked, and a few hours after Monday's IDF incursion killed eight people, including two civilians, Hamas again fired rockets at Sderot. Given the scope of the Israeli attack, this time the Palestinian Authority was unwilling to stop Hamas.

Despite Israel's ongoing policy of proactive defense against Hamas and other terrorist groups, Israeli and Palestinian officials are working intensively on a phased cease-fire agreement that would lead eventually to a full Israeli pullout from Palestinian areas and to free Palestinian elections.

The idea is that the Palestinians first take effective security control in Gaza, which would mean keeping Hamas in check. If that takes hold, the cease-fire could spread to West Bank cities, starting with Nablus and Bethlehem and going on to Ramallah and Hebron, then to Jenin, Tulkarm and Kalkilya.

The plan initially was put forward in January by an Israeli team led by Sharon's bureau chief, Dov Weisglass. In late February, P.A. Interior Minister Hani Hassan came back with a detailed draft of his own.

That draft now is the basis of the intensive negotiations.

Sharon aides say that if a lasting cease-fire is achieved, the prime minister will be ready to withdraw Israeli troops to pre-intifada lines.

That would enable elections in the Palestinian territories, as envisaged in the international "road map" for an Israeli-Palestinian peace being finalized by the diplomatic "Quartet" of the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia.

Sharon aides dismiss assessments in the Israeli press that the right-wing government will not be able to move on the Palestinian track.

Immediately after his re-election, the aides note, Sharon held meetings with top Palestinian leaders — including the speaker of the Parliament, Ahmed Karia, and Finance Minister Salam Fayed — and say both sides are convinced they can work together.

Moreover, the aides maintain, Sharon has total control of all decision-making forums in his government: The parties to the right of Sharon's Likud, such as the National Religious Party and the National Union, have a total of only four Cabinet ministers in a government of 22.

In the 120-member Knesset, the aides say, Sharon can count on the support of 55 members of the coalition, as well as most of the Labor-led opposition, for any peace moves he makes.

Labor legislators remain unconvinced, however. Sharon could have formed a coalition with them, they say, but instead chose the far right — and that shows his true intentions, they claim.

In talks with Labor, the legislators say, Sharon spoke about being ready to evacuate settlements in the context of a final peace agreement with the Palestinians, but refused to put it in writing.

They also point out that both the National Religious Party and the National Union sent letters to Sharon objecting to the establishment of a Palestinian state, which is central to President Bush's vision of the two-state solution toward which the road map is supposed to lead, and which Sharon says he supports.

Yet Sharon says that at age 75, after spending most of his life as a soldier, his greatest ambition is to lead Israel to peace. His aides talk about his becoming an "Israeli de Gaulle."

Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna says he, too, hoped Sharon would become a peacemaker, but he lost hope after their coalition talks. Whether or not the negotiators soon achieve a cease-fire could be a first indication of where Sharon's second administration is headed. □

*(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)*

## JEWISH WORLD

### I.B. Singer works unpublished

Two unpublished works of the late novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer sit in archives at the University of Texas at Austin. Two novels — as well as a book-length memoir that was serialized in the Yiddish-language *Forward* — await publication while sitting in the university's Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the *New York Observer* newspaper reported.

The *Observer* said no one is preventing publication of the works at the archives, which owns most of Singer's papers, but that literary and publishing figures are debating the merits of translating the works into English.

One of the novels, "Yarme and Keyle," is said to be a "lurid" tale of "wild sexuality" revolving around pimps, prostitutes and white slave traders in pre-World War I Warsaw, the *Observer* said.

### Hungary helps observant voters

Hungary's Parliament decided to keep polls open for an extra two hours to allow observant Jews to vote in a crucial referendum on E.U. membership that falls on a Saturday.

Hungarian Jews and international organizations praised the Parliament's decision, which followed a request from the Hungarian Jewish community.

"We thank the Hungarian authorities for their cooperation and understanding. I hope that many Hungarian Jews will go out to vote on such an important day, which will define the future of Hungary for many generations to come," said Rabbi Moshe Garelik, executive director of the Brussels-based Rabbinical Center of Europe.

### Police: Paris bombing not terror

A car explosion Wednesday near a Jewish school in Paris was not aimed at the school, police said. The car, which was parked on a residential street near the Moshe Sharett Israeli School in northwest Paris, exploded when the car's owner, identified as a 55-year-old man with a criminal record, started the ignition, police said.

A bomb apparently had been placed under the driver's seat, they said, adding that they did not consider it an act of terrorism. The driver was killed in the blast and five bystanders were slightly injured.

### Jewish, church officials meet

Jewish officials met with members of the Eastern Orthodox Church as part of ongoing efforts to maintain an interfaith dialogue.

Leading the Jewish delegation at Monday's meeting in Athens was Israel Singer, chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. The Orthodox delegation was led by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France.

## Deadly Haifa suicide bombing followed many thwarted attacks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A suicide bus bombing in Haifa has shattered a relative period of calm in Israel and served as a stark reminder to a country bracing for the possible implications of a U.S.-led war against Iraq.

With the United States stepping up military and diplomatic preparations for a possible strike against Iraq, much of Israel was focused this week on when a war might break out and whether it would affect Israel.

But the focus changed abruptly Wednesday when at least 15 people were killed and more than 30 wounded in a suicide bombing on a Haifa bus.

Heftziba Shetreet, who was in a building opposite the bombing site, described the initial moments of confusion after she heard the explosion.

"In the first few seconds, we thought the war had started," she told Israel Radio. "We felt the explosion right above our heads.

"Within seconds we realized that there was a terrorist attack," she added. "We went outside and saw the bus, completely scorched, cloaked in smoke, and the wounded strewn all over. Without thinking, we immediately ran to help them."

It was the first time terrorists had succeeded in carrying out a suicide bombing in Israel since Jan. 5, when 23 people were killed, some of them foreign workers, after two suicide bombers launched an attack near Tel Aviv's old Central Bus Station.

But Israeli security and political officials stressed that the feeling of quiet was only an illusion, and that Israel has thwarted numerous attempted bombings since the Tel Aviv attack.

Ya'acov Borovsky, the police chief of the northern district, noted that there were some 50 alerts for possible terrorist attacks across Israel on Wednesday, but no specific warnings of an impending bombing in Haifa.

Immediately following the bombing, police in other northern communities went on alert for a possible attempt by terrorist groups to stage a string of attacks, Israel's Channel 2 television reported.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. But Hamas and Islamic Jihad praised the bombing, saying it came in response to Israeli military actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The attack was the first since the new Israeli government took office, but there was no immediate indication that the Cabinet would adopt a policy different from that of the previous government. As he has done following previous acts of terror, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon blamed the Palestinian Authority for the bombing, saying it had done nothing to stop such attacks.

Interior Minister Avraham Poraz of the Shinui Party, a new member of the Security Cabinet, said Israel should not dramatically alter its response to terrorist attacks.

"We must continue to fight terrorism all the time," he told Army Radio. "There is no difference between an attempted attack — and there are many of these — and an attack that succeeds.

"We should not act with an intent for revenge," he continued. "We must keep constant pressure on the Palestinians until the moderates understand that they must put pressure on the extremists."

Political sources were quoted as saying that the relative quiet of recent weeks was the direct result of the Israeli army's ongoing anti-terrorist activities in the West Bank and Gaza.

The United States and Britain were among the foreign nations condemning the attack. President Bush "stands strongly with the people of Israel in fighting terrorism, and his message to terrorists is that their efforts will not be successful," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Earlier this week, both the United States and Britain had criticized Israel for harming Palestinian civilians during anti-terror operations in the Gaza Strip.

Following the attack, Army Radio quoted Palestinians as reporting that Israeli tanks entered Jenin. Israel Radio reported that troops had arrested a senior Hamas militant in Ramallah. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**As Lieberman runs for president, his Senate office focuses on war***By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) may be spending his weekends in the early primary states of Iowa and New Hampshire, but inside his Senate office, the talk is all about war.

As Lieberman, who is running for president in 2004, prepared for a speech last week on the post-Saddam agenda for Iraq, the phones rang off the hook in the front office.

Two staffers took call after call from opponents of a possible U.S.-led war on Iraq, part of the Virtual March on Washington organized for Feb. 26 by the Win Without War Coalition.

By the end of the day, about 1,000 anti-war calls were logged.

But inside Lieberman's inner Senate office, with a mezuzah affixed to its door, Lieberman remains one of the staunchest supporters in the Democratic Party of U.S. military action against Iraq, even suggesting that the United States should act without the aid of its allies if necessary.

"The United States always has to reserve the right, if it feels its security requires it, to take unilateral action against a country or group that threatens its security," Lieberman told JTA in a wide-ranging interview.

Citing the threat Iraqi President Saddam Hussein poses to the rest of the world, Lieberman is confident that if the United States chooses to go to war with Iraq, international partners that now are putting up a fight will acquiesce.

"If we leave them with those chemical and biological weapons which almost everyone, including the French and the Germans, agree they have, before long they will be used against us or our allies in the region," he said, citing both America's Arab friends and Israel.

After Saddam is gone the United States and its allies will have a "moment of enormous opportunity" to make Iraq a model in the Arab world, as well as to place pressure on Iran and Syria to reject terrorism, Lieberman says.

But while he agrees with Bush on plans for Iraq, Lieberman repeatedly described the president's foreign policy as "arrogant," and said it could alienate America from the rest of the world.

"I think it's very important for the president to clearly spell out our vision of a post-Saddam Iraq as a way to get beyond both the alienation and the suspicions of what our motives are," he said.

Bush chose the evening of Feb. 26, just hours after Lieberman's speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, to announce his vision of the Middle East after Saddam has been swept from power.

Lieberman learned of the confluence of speeches only the night before, when a staffer saw an item announcing Bush's speech on The Washington Post's Web site. But the Lieberman camp quickly spun the story, arguing that "Lieberman leads, Bush follows."

The two speeches shared similar themes — calling for installation of democracy in Iraq, enhanced security and an increase in engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But Lieberman's camp says its candidate's speech was more detailed.

Lieberman has been pushing for greater U.S. effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, claiming that Bush has done little since his landmark June 24 speech calling for a change in the Palestinian regime, extensive reforms in the Palestinian Authority

— and, afterward, a Palestinian state with provisional borders.

"The problem with the administration in the Middle East is that it issued a policy but didn't try to do anything to implement it," Lieberman said. "That's the mistake."

Lieberman wants a high-level U.S. emissary on the ground to implement White House policy, starting with 100 percent effort by the Palestinians to prevent terrorism. Such effort, he said, would lead to reciprocal actions by Israel.

Lieberman also is uncomfortable that the Bush administration hopes to resume working after an Iraq war with its "Quartet" partners — the United Nations, European Union and Russia — on a framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

"We are trying to bring Israelis and the Palestinians to a better place," he said. "The only country that has the trust of both sides to do that is the United States."

Lieberman is seeking the Democratic nomination for president at a time when global anti-Semitism is on the rise. While he experienced little bigotry on the campaign trail as the first Jewish vice presidential candidate on a major party ticket in 2000, the world is a very different place just two years later.

But Lieberman says he is confident that, if elected, the world will accept him, largely because of the power and influence the U.S. president holds, regardless of his religion.

"I think the question the world will ask is not what the religions of the candidates of 2004 are, but what are their policies," he said.

Lieberman also is counting on his belief that American voters will not choose their leader based on religion.

Lieberman and his family won a place in many Democrats' hearts in 2000, when he ran as Al Gore's vice presidential candidate. Mementos from that run line the walls of his office, including a picture of his appearance on NBC's "Late Night With Conan O'Brien," when he sang Frank Sinatra's "My Way."

But Lieberman is on his own this time. He is considered one of the most hawkish of the nine experienced Democratic candidates who plan to run in the Democratic primaries.

While he may have one of the better chances of any Democrat to defeat President Bush, winning the Democratic nomination is likely to be the biggest challenge.

"I'm gonna be me," Lieberman says almost defiantly. "I've come too far to try to alter anything about what I believe is in the best interest of our country."

Lieberman notes that the Jewish community will be "the natural place to start" for fund raising, but he half jokes that many Democratic contenders for president — and an increasing number of Republicans — probably feel the same way.

"I've felt a lot of pride and excitement in the Jewish-American community and a lot of support," he said. "But obviously, I have been touched and encouraged by the excitement and pride and support I've received from a lot of other people in the country."

Being an observant Jew wouldn't prevent him from fulfilling his duties if he elected president, Lieberman says. While he does not campaign on the Sabbath, when necessary he has worked in Congress on Shabbat, arguing that working on behalf of others is part of the duties of his religion.

"I have always made a distinction between being involved in politics on the Sabbath and fulfilling a governmental responsibility," he said. "If faith, history and your own hard work put you in a position where a lot of God's creations are depending on your leadership to protect their safety, their health, their well-being, then it seems to me that has to come first." □