



# Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Bombing victims buried

Funerals were held Thursday for most of the 15 victims killed a day earlier in a suicide bus bombing in Haifa. Many of the victims were high school students.

The names of 13 of the victims have been released so far: Smadar Firstater, 17; Kamar Abu Hamed, 12; Daniel Haroush, 16; Mordechai Hershko, 41, and his son, Tom Hershko, 16; Meital Katav, 20; Tal Kerman, 17; Staff Sgt. Eliyahu Laham, 22; Abigail Leitel, 14; Yuval Mendelevitch, 13; Staff Sgt. Be'eri Oved, 21; Mark Takash, 54; and Assaf Tzur (Zolinger), 17. [Page 3]

### U.S. citizen among bomb victims

A U.S. citizen was among the 15 people killed in Wednesday's suicide bombing aboard a Haifa bus.

Abigail Leitel, 14, was an eighth grader at Haifa's Reali High School majoring in biology and environmental studies.

She was killed while on her way home from school.

Born in New Hampshire, she came to Israel as an infant with her family when her father came to study at the Technion — Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. He was later appointed representative of the Baptist Church in Israel.

Abigail — along with Yuval Mendelevitch, 13, who was also killed in the bombing — had been part of the Children Teaching Children program at the Jewish-Arab Center for Peace at Givat Haviva since last September.

The program teaches pluralism, tolerance and coexistence. [Page 3]

### 11 Palestinians killed in Gaza

Palestinians said at least 11 people were killed in an Israeli military raid Thursday in a Gaza refugee camp.

The raid, which provoked hours of pitched battles with Palestinian gunmen in the Jabalya refugee camp, followed a deadly suicide bombing the day before in Haifa.

Palestinians claimed at least eight people were killed when army tank fire hit a group of people who had gathered near a burning building. The Israeli army said the only death caused by Israeli actions of the tank shell was a Palestinian who was preparing to launch a rocket at a tank.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Read his lips: When Bush talks of Mideast engagement, is he serious?

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Bush administration says overthrowing Saddam Hussein will clear a path to renewed American engagement in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

But many in Washington are skeptical that the administration's attention will shift to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict once an anticipated war on Iraq is over.

Under pressure to outline his vision for a post-war Iraq, President Bush told the American Enterprise Institute on Feb. 26 that the overthrow of the Iraqi president would promote Israeli-Palestinian peace by ridding Palestinian terrorists of a major source of funding.

"Without this outside support for terrorism, Palestinians who are working for reform and long for democracy will be in a better position to choose new leaders," Bush said. "True leaders who strive for peace, true leaders who faithfully serve the people. A Palestinian state must be a reformed and peaceful state that abandons forever the use of terror."

Bush called on Israel to work toward a peace agreement and — "as progress is made toward peace" — to end all settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Bush also called on Arab states to oppose terrorism and "state clearly they will live in peace with Israel."

In a landmark speech last June, Bush called on Palestinians to replace Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat with leaders not compromised by terrorism, and said Palestinians would need to curb violence against Israel before they could achieve statehood.

While that speech remains the cornerstone of White House policy on the Middle East, critics argue that Bush has not fleshed it out, repeatedly stalling the presentation of the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace that is being prepared by the diplomatic "Quartet" of the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia.

State Department sources say last week's speech was part of the White House's efforts to court the international community to support a U.S.-led war on Iraq. The speech also was intended as recognition of positive Palestinian steps — such as Arafat's pledge to appoint a prime minister and new financial controls recently instituted in the Palestinian Authority.

"It wasn't lip service," a State Department official said. "We've been seeing progress on the Palestinian side, some indication that maybe the ideals are starting to take hold."

"The Palestinian issue is likely to be a focus, along with other things," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "Hopefully, the conditions will be right for new initiatives."

But many in Washington think it may be unlikely that Bush can achieve his goals in the Middle East. Analysts argue that Bush's comments downplayed the amount of time and influence that will be needed to bring democracy to Iraq and make the type of changes necessary to end a U.S. military presence there after a war.

In fact, they note, U.S. troops are still in Kosovo, where NATO forces secured a peace in 1999.

David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, says the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be No. 5 on the Bush administration's foreign

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Demolition order for mosque

A Nazareth court issued a demolition order for a controversial mosque being built next to the Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation. The court ruled Thursday that all construction at the mosque site had been done illegally, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The court ruled in December 2001 that building should be halted, but the wakf, or Islamic religious trust, ignored the order, the paper reported. Plans to build the mosque in the shadow of the Basilica of the Annunciation have raised tensions between Catholics and Muslims, with each side repeatedly pressing its demands on Israel. Christians believe the basilica is built on the spot where the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to Jesus.

### Minister: No action against Arafat

Israel will not take any action against Yasser Arafat before a U.S.-led offensive against Iraq, a Cabinet member said. Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman told Israel Radio that it is necessary to "get rid" of the Palestinian Authority president, whom he blamed for terrorist attacks, but said such a move would have to wait.

At a Security Cabinet meeting Wednesday night in response to the Haifa bus bombing, the ministers approved more anti-terror operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### Israel to let PLO meeting proceed

Israel will allow a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council to proceed as planned Saturday, despite Wednesday's terror attack in Haifa.

A Palestinian legislator said Thursday that none of the council members had been banned from Saturday's meeting in Ramallah, The Associated Press reported. The meeting was called to discuss the appointment of a Palestinian prime minister.



## Daily News Bulletin

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policy priority list after an Iraq war. Ahead of it are stabilizing Iraq, prosecuting the war on terrorism, curtailing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — especially from North Korea — and helping spread democracy in the Middle East.

That's not even counting domestic concerns such as a weak economy and the requisite focus on Bush's own campaign as the 2004 election approaches.

"This administration is going to have a full plate," Makovsky said.

Therefore, the administration is likely to expend the political capital needed for momentum on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking only if it sees a light at the end of the tunnel. That, Makovsky argues, is dependent on cooperation from the Arab world to push for new Palestinian leadership and to pressure the Palestinian Authority to take reforms seriously.

"This isn't Bill Clinton, who will want to run off to a summit," he said. "Before inserting the prestige of his office, Bush will want to see signs that he can succeed."

But Bush's promises of increased engagement after a war mean that the White House will have to do something, Makovsky said. If the time isn't ripe for a major effort, the White House may suffice with throwing some money at the problem in the form of increased aid or it may convene an international conference — steps that aren't likely to produce real progress.

However, Steven Spiegel, a professor of political science at UCLA, says it's disingenuous to place the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as only one of several priorities for the Middle East, because solving the conflict is central to achieving the administration's other goals in the region.

The missing element is not Arab support, he says, because "the mainstream Arabs are looking desperately, they want" the Israeli-Palestinian violence "off the television screens."

Instead, the problem is the United States, which has not followed through on its declared goals, he says.

"The president has had an extremely good declaratory policy," said Spiegel, a scholar with the pro-peace Israel Policy Forum. "The problem is the actions have been anemic at best, and he really hasn't delivered on the promises of the speeches."

For example, he notes, the administration hasn't had an envoy on the ground in the region for almost a year.

Jon Alterman, director of Middle East programs at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says the key is that neither Israelis nor Palestinians are willing to change their local political environments to make them more conducive to peace.

Alterman says it's unlikely the United States will make a bold move on the Israeli-Palestinian front unless there is a change in Palestinian leadership — or unless Israel and the White House change their view that such a change in leadership is essential for progress.

Given those parameters, Alterman said last week's speech was intended mostly to appease an international audience.

"When you talk to a foreign audience, you get a lot of exasperation," he said. "A lot of folks in the international community are incensed that we see Iraq as the prime threat to peace and stability in the Middle East, while they see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the threat to peace and stability in the Middle East."

Bush, who hopes to build international support for a new U.N. resolution authorizing military action against Iraq, is believed to be using talk of progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front to get more countries on board for an attack on Iraq.

There is some legitimacy to Bush's claims, Alterman said: Many in the administration believe Saddam's overthrow would show U.S. resolve to combat weapons proliferation and rogue regimes. That could make it easier for pro-democracy leaders to emerge in the Middle East.

If that does happen, the White House could play a dramatic role. But there is much skepticism that the situation will unfold as the White House hopes.

Some wonder if the White House has a clear understanding of the probable political dynamics in the region after an Iraq war and the obstacles that will face the administration. What is not being questioned, for the most part, is the intensity of Bush's belief in the requirements he has outlined for progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

"The read is that he really believes it, and you are underestimating him if you think he's not committed to his goals," one Jewish official said. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Paper called to defend cartoon

Britain's official media watchdog group demanded that a newspaper answer allegations of anti-Semitism after a recent cartoon depicted Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon eating a baby. The Press Complaints Commission acted in response to a complaint from the Israeli Embassy in London that was made with Sharon's knowledge.

The cartoon, which appeared in the Independent newspaper just before Israel's January elections, showed Sharon crouched in the ruins of a village, biting the head off a baby as helicopters circled overhead broadcasting the message "Vote Sharon." Sharon asks in the drawing: "What's wrong . . . You never seen a politician kissing babies before?"

### Group: Canadian Anti-Semitism up

Anti-Semitic incidents in Canada increased by more than 60 percent last year, according to B'nai Brith Canada. The total number of 459 incidents is the highest in the 20 years the group has compiled such figures.

The largest increase in incidents occurred in the greater Toronto area, which saw an 87 percent rise.

### Jews roughed up at protest

Anti-war protesters intimidated and roughed up several Jewish students on Wednesday at Toronto's York University. After police arrested four of the protesters, more than 100 others rushed through campus and occupied the office of university president Lorna Marsden.

Along the way they overturned the tables of the pro-American Canadian Alliance Party and, according to student Ya'akov Rath, pushed him to the ground. Rath, who is campus president of Canadian Alliance, said he was attacked because he was "visibly Jewish," and that the protesters attempted to burn the booth's U.S. flag.

Miriam Levin, a second-year student in York's Jewish studies program, says she was subjected to verbal abuse from demonstrators who blocked her car from campus. "I just rolled down my window and said, 'Making me late to class isn't going to help your cause,' and some guy started screaming at me that I was like the Israeli army, 'that I was like an occupier and a terrorist,'" she said.

### Irish Jewish community dwindling

The Jewish population of Ireland is steadily dwindling. The Jewish community, which numbered some 5,500 just after World War II, now numbers about 1,100, Reuters reported Thursday.

Dublin, which once boasted seven synagogues, now has one Orthodox and one Reform synagogue, the report added.

## Families who lost children in Haifa bombing find no answers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — "Answer me," blared the headline of an Israeli newspaper Thursday, summarizing a father's desperate efforts to reach his son after their cell phone conversation was cut off by a suicide bomb attack.

For Yossi Mendelevitch, what he feared most came true: His son Yuval, 13, was among the 15 people killed in Wednesday's bombing of a city bus in the northern city of Haifa.

Like Yuval, many of the victims were teen-agers on their way home from school or extracurricular activities. Their stunned classmates and friends gathered at an impromptu memorial at the site of the attack on Thursday, before many headed on to the series of funerals that were held throughout the day.

Mendelevitch recounted how he and his son would regularly speak on the phone during Yuval's ride home from school.

"We had a normal conversation, and then suddenly he said, 'Dad, I love you,' " Mendelevitch told Army Radio. "In retrospect, those were his last words. The call was cut off for some reason, and I couldn't reach him again. I hadn't yet heard about the attack, so I wasn't worried."

When he learned of the attack, Mendelevitch said, "a shudder ran through my body."

Despite initial reports that cited the wrong bus route, Mendelevitch said he had a deep fear it was his son's bus. He ran out to begin looking for his son. After searches at area hospitals proved futile, he and his wife realized all was lost.

Mendelevitch described how he wanted to remember his son.

"A whole, handsome boy, like in the pictures," he said. "He had amazing potential. He loved computer games, math, climbing. He was in a hiking club, he was a good student."

Mordechai "Moti" Hershko and his son, Tom, were returning from a trip to Netanya when the explosion took place.

"They were the best of friends, and I'm sure" Moti "is watching over him up above," said Tom's mother, Ruth, who was divorced from Hershko.

Tom also had called his mother from the bus to tell her that he was on his way home and that he had a surprise for her.

"He took the surprise with him to his grave," the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot quoted her as saying.

Relatives told Yediot that financial difficulties had forced Hershko to sell his car, which was why the two were traveling on the bus. They said he had recently found some work and was looking forward to sharing the news with his son and former wife.

Ruth said she had had a surprise waiting for her son as well.

"Tom loved surfing the Internet, and yesterday I hooked him up to high-speed Internet," she said. "Now no one will use it."

Ruth described the relationship between her only son and her ex-husband as extremely close.

Abigail Leitel, 14, was an eighth grader at Haifa's Reali High School, concentrating in biology and environmental studies. She was on her way to a friend's house after school when the explosion occurred.

An American citizen who was born in New Hampshire, Abigail was an infant when her family came to Israel so that her father, Philip, could study at the Technion — Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. The family, who are Baptists, settled in Haifa.

At Abigail's home, family members had a hard time absorbing the tragedy.

"When you live in a place where there is war, you are aware that it could happen. But none of us ever imagined that the terrible day would come when our young daughter would not come home," her father told Yediot.

Abigail and her classmate, Yuval, were part of the Children Teaching Children program at the Jewish-Arab Center for Peace at Givat Haviva. The program teaches pluralism, tolerance and coexistence. They and their classmates were preparing for an upcoming encounter with Arab youth, reports said. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

**Jews in Bulgaria and Macedonia have different views of Holocaust**

By Ruth E. Gruber

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Sixty years ago this month, Bulgarian citizens took the first heroic steps to prevent the deportation of 50,000 Bulgarian Jews to Nazi death camps.

It also was 60 years ago, however, that Nazi-allied Bulgarian occupiers brutally rounded up and deported nearly all the Jews of Macedonia, as well as Jews from parts of Greece and southern Serbia.

Parallel ceremonies in Bulgaria and Macedonia next week are marking the twin events from two decidedly different viewpoints.

In Bulgaria, where the wartime heroism has prompted numerous awards and honors in recent years, the ceremonies are what the U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria, James Pardew, called a "celebration of courage and tolerance" honoring individual Bulgarians and their political and religious leaders.

"Through their decisive actions," Pardew told an audience in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia earlier this year, "Bulgaria ensured its place in history as a society that respects the life and human dignity of all people."

In Macedonia, however, the ceremonies have a different character.

They are a mournful commemoration of the almost total annihilation of centuries of local Jewish life and culture. Macedonian Jews want to make sure this fact isn't overlooked amid the celebration of the Bulgarian rescue.

"It's a two-way thing," Zdravko Sami, vice president of the 200-member Macedonian Jewish community, told JTA in a telephone interview from the capital, Skopje.

"First of all," he said, "it is thanks to a part of the Bulgarian population, including religious, intellectual and political leaders, that the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria itself was stopped — and they deserve the recognition."

On the other hand, he went on, "The Bulgarian government and authorities were the culprits in the deportation and extermination of 98 percent of Macedonia's Jews. That's a record percentage of destruction."

The ceremonies in Macedonia include the wreath-layings, speeches and other formal events that annually mark the occasion.

But, Sami said, they also will include a series of seminars, lectures, broadcasts and other initiatives throughout the year aimed at furthering awareness of the Holocaust and its impact. The first of these was a public roundtable discussion this week on Holocaust memory, anti-Semitism and multicultural coexistence.

It was cosponsored by Macedonia's Holocaust Fund, which was established last year with funds granted by the government in compensation for the heirless private property of Macedonian Jews killed in the Shoah.

The rescue of Bulgarian Jewry represented a unique chapter in Holocaust history, but its full story remained largely unknown until the fall of communism in 1989.

During World War II, Bulgaria became an ally of Nazi Germany, largely so that it could occupy and annex neighboring territories it had lost in earlier wars — areas in what is today Macedonia, the Thrace region of Greece and parts of southern

Serbia around the town of Pirot. In early 1943, the Bulgarian government signed a secret agreement with the Nazis to deport 20,000 Jews to death camps in Poland. The deportations started with Jews in the annexed territories.

Between March 4 and March 11 of that year, Bulgarian soldiers rounded up thousands of Jews, loaded them into Bulgarian boxcars and shipped them en masse to Treblinka.

"Of 11,363 Jews who were deported to the camps in Poland — the residents of Macedonia, Thrace and the city of Pirot — only 12 people survived," Israeli diplomat and researcher Nir Baruch told the producers of "The Optimists," a recent film about the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry.

More boxcars already were lined up to receive a first wave of 8,500 Jews in Bulgaria proper. Word of their imminent deportation leaked out, however, and the news triggered protests throughout Bulgarian society.

The then-vice president of Parliament, Dimitar Peshev, sprang into action when he was warned of the imminent deportation of Jews from his hometown, Kyustendil, on March 9. He made public the secret deportation deal and forced a temporary cancellation of the order.

Jacky Comforty, the Israeli director of "The Optimists," tells how on March 10 his grandfather and his family, along with many of their neighbors, already had reported to the local school in the city of Plovdiv, while police sealed the doors of their houses.

"They all carried suitcases packed with clothes and food for a long trip," Comforty recounted. "Treblinka was to be their destination. But they never reached it. After waiting all day long in the school yard, they were simply sent home."

Peshev, meanwhile, galvanized 42 fellow legislators to sign a protest petition to the king. Orthodox Church leaders in Sofia and Plovdiv also spoke out, and professors, doctors, lawyers, students, labor leaders and peasants staged protests, including marches and street demonstrations.

Within weeks, Boris III told the Nazi leadership that he needed the Jews as construction workers. He moved them into labor camps, but refused to deport them or hand them over to the Nazis.

"No one in any other country with a pro-Nazi government had ever used his political power to bring about a moral crisis among the accomplices of the Final Solution," Italian author Gabriele Nissim, who wrote a book on Peshev, said at a lecture in Budapest.

Peshev, he said, had managed to transform politicians who had "opportunistically fallen in with the Germans into men with a conscience and mind of their own."

"The Optimists" and Nissim's book on Peshev, "The Man Who Stopped Hitler," are part of a spate of recent documentaries and books that have brought the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry to world attention since the fall of communism.

Postwar propaganda had credited Communist leaders for having saved Bulgarian Jewry.

In 1945, the Communists sentenced Peshev himself to 15 years of prison for collaborating with the Nazis as a member of the wartime Parliament. He was accused of having worked to save the Jews for money.

Peshev was released after just one year. He lived in Kyustendil until his death in 1973, impoverished and largely forgotten until his rehabilitation in the 1990s.

Last October, a museum dedicated to his life was opened in the Kyustendil house where he was born. □