

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Suicide bombing wounds dozens

Dozens of people were wounded in a suicide bombing in the coastal city of Netanya on Sunday.

The secretary of Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Shalakh, said the attack was, in part, a show of solidarity with the Iraqi people. [Page 1]

Two Palestinians killed

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians who tried to infiltrate a kibbutz near the Gaza Strip. Soldiers killed the two men Sunday after they set off an alarm while crossing through an electronic gate. Meanwhile, a Palestinian youth was killed and five Israeli soldiers lightly hurt in weekend clashes.

AIPAC conference opens

The main pro-Israel lobby is seeking letters from lawmakers, urging President Bush to stand behind his June 24 speech of last year criticizing Yasser Arafat.

The annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee opened Sunday, with close to 5,000 people expected to attend. On Tuesday, attendees will urge lawmakers to support the letters to the president, as well as a supplemental aid package that includes \$1 billion in military aid for Israel and \$9 billion in loan guarantees.

Speakers at the conference include Secretary of State Colin Powell; Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice; and Silvan Shalom, Israel's foreign minister.

Lawmakers call for day of prayer

Many Jewish lawmakers joined a small minority in opposing a House resolution asking President Bush to designate a day of "fasting and prayer" for soldiers fighting in Iraq.

The bill, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives on March 27 by a 346-49 vote, called on the president to ask U.S. citizens to "seek guidance from God to achieve a greater understanding of our own failings and to learn how we can do better in our everyday activities" and "to gain resolve in meeting the challenges that confront our nation."

The only Jewish lawmakers to support the nonbinding resolution were Reps. Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.), Sander Levin (D-Mich.), Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Martin Frost (D-Texas) and Eric Cantor (R-Va.).

Islamic Jihad claims bombing; says it is linked to war in Iraq

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian support for Iraq took on a new dimension this week with a suicide bombing in Israel that Islamic Jihad said was aimed at showing solidarity with Baghdad.

Dozens of people were wounded, six seriously, when a suicide bomber blew himself up Sunday next to a crowded restaurant in the coastal city of Netanya. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility and identified the bomber as a resident of Tulkarm.

The group's secretary, Ramadan Shalakh, said the attack commemorated Land Day, which itself marks the deaths of six Israeli Arabs during protests in 1976 against state confiscation of Arab lands in the Galilee. Shalakh also said the bombing was a show of solidarity with the Iraqi people.

Israeli security officials have warned that the U.S.-led military campaign in Iraq could prompt a wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks.

Solidarity with Iraq was also a prominent theme in Sunday's Land Day demonstrations. Large numbers of police were stationed around Arab population centers in northern Israel but were instructed to keep a low profile. The Israeli Arab leadership had called for peaceful demonstrations, and there were no violent incidents.

Sunday's bombing was the first in Israel since a March 5 suicide bus bombing in Haifa that killed 17 people.

The attack came as Israel continued to closely monitor the U.S.-led military campaign in Iraq to determine whether to alter the level of civil alert in the country.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Cabinet on Sunday that the army would begin to reduce the number of reserve soldiers who had been mobilized. Mofaz said this included reducing the number of reservists stationed at gas mask distribution centers, because most Israelis had already refreshed or replaced their kits.

At the same time, Mofaz said an Iraqi attack on Israel was still possible, and Israelis should continue to carry their gas masks with them and maintain sealed rooms.

For Israelis wondering about when the civil alert for Iraq may be lowered, Sunday's attack in Netanya was a reminder of the ongoing security threats close to home.

The attack occurred around 1 p.m., when a suicide bomber blew himself up on a pedestrian mall near the entrance to a restaurant that was crowded with diners.

According to reports, the terrorist was prevented from entering the London Cafe by a group of soldiers who were assigned to security detail in the area. One of the soldiers who approached the bomber was very seriously wounded in the explosion, the daily Yediot Achronot reported.

One witness, Amos Harel, said he caught a passing glance of the terrorist before the explosion, but there was nothing that raised his concern.

"I saw the terrorist, but not with focus. He didn't look suspicious," Harel told Israel Radio. "Apparently when he saw the soldiers passing by, he decided to blow himself up."

Another Netanya resident, Ilana, said she heard the explosion and came running to the scene, knowing that her sister was eating there.

"There were people lying on the ground, lots of flesh everywhere. This is the fifth attack I've seen," she told the radio. "Every terrorist attack is more painful and more frightening, and we wait for the next one."

Among the 50 wounded were 10 Israeli soldiers. One person sustained very serious wounds; five others were listed in serious condition. Police said the casualties were not even worse because the bomb used in the attack was relatively small, and because the

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. soldiers stop journalists

Two Israeli journalists were detained in Iraq by U.S. troops, who accused them of being spies.

Along with at least one Portuguese colleague, Dan Scemama of Israel's Channel One Television and Boaz Bismuth of Yediot Achronot rented a jeep and entered Iraq without proper accreditation, driving alongside American convoys.

They phoned in reports based on conversations with U.S. troops and Iraqis. Scemama's girlfriend, Shlomit Yarkoni, said the journalists were forced to stop Tuesday beside six tanks because of sandstorms, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. Early March 26, soldiers woke them up at gunpoint and accused them of espionage.

They later were kept in a closed jeep for 36 hours.

The Portuguese journalist asked to phone home and soldiers beat him, breaking his ribs, according to Ha'aretz. Concerned about loss of contact with the journalists, Yediot Achronot asked the Pentagon to help find them. After 48 hours, a helicopter flew the reporters to a U.S. military base in Kuwait, where they were released and given their phones back.

'Peace activists' hide terrorist

Israeli troops found a senior Islamic Jihad terrorist being sheltered in the West Bank offices of international "peace activists." Israeli troops found the wanted Islamic Jihad man March 27 when they raided the Jenin offices of the International Solidarity Movement. A spokesman for the group said they didn't know who the man was or that he was wanted, but soldiers said group members tried to hide the man. The army said the suspect was a senior member of Islamic Jihad who planned a number of failed attacks on Israel.

An American member of the group was killed March 16 while trying to stop an Israeli bulldozer from destroying a house used by terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

terrorist did not manage to get into the restaurant. Israeli police, border police and troops were out in heavy force Sunday, as part of the deployment for Land Day, as well as the civil defense alert because of Iraq.

Police Commissioner Shlomo Aharonishky said that preventing terrorist attacks is difficult, despite intense efforts by security forces to thwart attacks.

"There is motivation and desire to carry out attacks," he said. The public "should be ready for additional attacks." □

Negotiations in South Africa keep large Orthodox shul within the fold

By Moira Schneider

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — One of South Africa's largest Orthodox congregations has settled a dispute with the country's Union of Orthodox Synagogues that almost led to its withdrawal from the umbrella organization.

South Africa's Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation — also known as Marais Road — has had an acrimonious relationship for years with the UOS, which culminated in a special meeting last August in which the synagogue considered leaving the governing body.

The primary points of contention were the so-called "quickie" conversions performed in America, facilitated by the congregation's American-born rabbi, Elihu Jacob Steinhorn, that were not recognized by the local Beth Din, or religious court.

However, a decision in August to give the parties six more months to negotiate paid off. A joint statement read out at the congregation's annual meeting last week announced that the differences between the shul and the UOS over Steinhorn have been "amicably resolved" in full accord with halachah, or Jewish law.

It also said that after Passover 2004, Steinhorn would retire and become rabbi emeritus.

South Africa's chief rabbi, Cyril Harris, told JTA, "We are all very pleased that the Green and Sea Point Synagogue is remaining in the family of Orthodox congregations. Every effort will be made to find a really suitable successor to Rabbi Steinhorn. We look forward to an era of full cooperation with the religious authorities."

Clive Rabinowitz, Marais Road's new president — who had proposed withdrawing from the UOS last August — said congregants felt "general relief" that the matter had been settled.

"We must go forward," he said. "We can't have our energy stuck in in-fighting, and must do what is best for the congregation."

Judge Dennis Davis of the Cape High Court, who was involved in the settlement negotiations, said that not having Steinhorn in a synagogue as significant as Sea Point — the largest in the southern hemisphere, by some estimates — was a "very, very major loss to Jewish life in South Africa. With all the difficulties, he remains, in my view, the one singularly modern Orthodox rabbi in this country." □

Europeans scolded on anti-Semitism

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Natan Sharansky met with the French and Belgian ambassadors to discuss the growth of anti-Semitism in those countries.

Sharansky, the minister in charge of Diaspora affairs, called for the meetings with France and Belgium, which ranked first and third, respectively, in a survey of incidents of anti-Semitism around the world. France led the world list with 154 instances of anti-Semitism in 2002, followed by America with 120 and Belgium with 64.

Sharansky plans to turn "this issue of anti-Semitism into an active part of our relations with other countries," he told the Jerusalem Post.

Also last week, the Anti-Defamation League and the Simon Wiesenthal Center issued warnings about anti-Semitism in Europe.

The ADL sent letters to the governments of Belgium, France and Germany, asking them to take a strong stand against anti-Semitic acts in their countries and warning that anti-war protests often verge on anti-Semitism. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Rabbi retracts anti-war stand

The head of the Conservative movement's main rabbinical seminary backed off his public opposition to the war in Iraq.

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, told *The New York Times* he ordered the rabbinical school's public relations department to issue a retraction of anti-war comments he had made during a March 20 prayer service, which he did not expect to be publicized.

"I did not think that I should go on a crusade while the war is on," Schorsch said.

Donors back non-Jewish causes

Jews are among the top givers of major philanthropic gifts, but largely to non-Jewish causes.

Of 865 donations of \$10 million or more made between 1995 and 2000, 188 came from Jews — but only 18 of those mega-gifts went to Jewish organizations, according to a study by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research in San Francisco.

While Jews accounted for 22 percent — or \$5.3 billion — of the \$29.3 billion in major donations made during that period, only \$318 million was earmarked for Jewish causes, the study said.

Some outreach jobs saved

Reform rabbis and their congregants dug into their pockets to save some specialists in outreach to interfaith families from being fired.

The Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations was due to drop part-time interfaith outreach coordinators for each of its 13 regions nationwide in a budget-saving move Monday, but grass-roots campaigns raised enough money to pay for three positions for two to three years.

Faith-based plan changed?

The Senate's "faith-based" plan may be changed to address constitutional concerns shared by many Jewish groups.

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Penn.) said March 27 that he supports removing a section of the Charitable Aid, Recovery and Empowerment Act that has provoked constitutional concerns among some groups.

Hebrew U. memorial planned

A commemoration of last year's bombing at Hebrew University is being planned on U.S. college campuses.

On April 10, the North American Jewish Student Alliance is planning to memorialize the July 31 bombing on campuses across the country with videos about each of the victims.

NAJSA currently has reached 75 percent of its goal of 40 participating campuses.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Documents just found in Spain may shed light on Jewish mysticism

By Jerome Socolovsky

MADRID (JTA) — It was truly a historic find.

About 15 years ago, archivists examining several yellowed volumes of notarial records in the city of Girona in northeastern Spain began suspecting that the covers were lined with precious historical documents.

They carefully picked apart the volumes and found a multitude of Hebrew manuscripts embedded in the covers, including business records and other contracts between Jews, and even a fragment from the Torah.

Researchers now suspect that another 162 books dating from the 15th and 16th centuries might also contain an unprecedented treasure of Judaica, and believe that all the manuscripts can be recovered with the latest technology. They are drawing up plans for an ambitious project to open all of the books.

The documents could shed light on a thriving medieval Jewish community that is believed to have been a center of Jewish mystical learning.

While nothing is certain until the delicate covers are disassembled, the Girona historical archives could contain the biggest trove of medieval Hebrew manuscripts ever found in Europe.

"The archives are very potent sources of information on the Jews of Girona," said Ansumpcio Hosta of the Centro Bonastruc Borta, a museum of Jewish history in Girona. Bonastruc Borta is the name of the mystical scholar Nachmanides in the Catalan language.

"There's a multitude of information on the daily life of the Jews, on who got married to whom, who bought what property and what kind of trades they were in," she said.

The unopened volumes could contain manuscripts that shed light on the origins of Kabbalah itself, she added.

"It would really be a dream, because sources of that kind from that time are very rare. That would really make us feel proud," said Hosta, who also is one of the leaders of an effort to recover the Jewish heritage of Girona and other Spanish cities.

However, she added a note of caution: "It's also possible we might find lots of plain filler paper."

Israeli scholar Yoel Rappel has told Israeli media that the volumes could contain hitherto unseen pages of Kabbalah or writings of Nachmanides, a finding that he said would be "tremendously significant."

The Girona manuscripts are believed to have been left behind by the Jews of the medium-sized city, located between Barcelona and the French border.

Girona had a Jewish presence since at least the ninth century and was the birthplace of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, also known as Nachmanides or the Ramban.

The community of at least 700 Jews began to suffer pogroms in 1331. Most chose martyrdom when anti-Jewish riots fired up by anti-Semitic preachers swept across Spain in 1391. By 1492, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella decreed the expulsion of Spain's Jews, only around 100 Jews still lived in Girona. The last synagogue and the remaining property owned by Jews then were sold to the municipal notary.

Several years ago, researchers at the Provincial Historical Archive began to suspect that something of interest was lining the covers of 165 yellowed notarial tomes.

The suspicions arose because the covers looked like they contained filler paper, archivist Santi Soler said. But researchers also remembered that several times before in Spanish historical libraries, Hebrew documents had been found embedded inside book covers.

"We knew that a treasure might exist inside these covers because it was common in those days to pad book covers with papers that weren't seen as having any use," Soler said.

Indeed, the practice was part of the general spirit of the times, when sacred Jewish objects were desecrated without qualms. Museums today display tombstones stolen from Jewish cemeteries that were used as washing tables and road pavement. □

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Ruling allowing textbook raises church-state issue in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Should religion be taught at Russian public schools and, if yes, how can schools achieve a balance that would not hurt Jewish students and others from minority faiths?

A Russian court decision to allow a controversial school textbook that Jewish and human rights groups say contains anti-Semitic passages has raised these broader church-state issues.

Some Russians charge that allowing the introduction of religion in the schools would also introduce religious coercion into the country's educational curriculum.

But others, including Russia's two chief rabbis, say teaching religion in schools would be a way to undo the damage caused by decades of Communist rule.

On March 24, the Meschansky District Court upheld an earlier decision by Moscow prosecutors, who twice refused to bring charges of inciting ethnic strife against the editor and publisher of the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture, a textbook that has been distributed to schools in Moscow and other regions.

Critics say the textbook is full of xenophobia and spreads the idea of Jewish responsibility for killing Jesus. Some Orthodox Christian experts agree that the textbook is flawed.

Yakov Krotov, a Christian writer, describes the textbook as containing some "medieval anti-Semitism." The textbook, which was recommended for use by a joint panel of experts from the Ministry of Education and the Russian Orthodox Church, argues that Jesus died because the Jews were obsessed with "earthly well-being and power over other peoples" rather than spiritual values.

The textbook authors have indicated that a second edition will take the complaints of human rights activists into account.

Though the court's decision to dismiss a hate crime case has irritated some human rights and Jewish defense activists, many in the Jewish community are more concerned by the broader issues.

Religious education in public schools is a highly sensitive and controversial subject in Russia, where interpretations of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state vary greatly — and where a system of church-state relations is being painfully developed after decades of Soviet atheism.

Says Peter Shelisch, a Jewish member of Russia's Parliament: "To teach religion at public schools is destructive for the society. The question is not even about how Jews and other minorities are treated within the framework of such a course. There is a danger that such a step would change the secular nature of our schools."

Leading Jewish religious authorities disagree.

"To me there is no doubt that a religious component in education is needed to fill a vacuum of ideology left after Communism," says Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis.

Adolph Shayevich, Russia's other chief rabbi, agrees with Lazar. "I have a very positive attitude toward the introduction in Russian schools of optional classes on the foundations" of Russian Orthodox history, he said in an interview with the Moscow daily *Izvestiya*.

Both rabbis stress that such a course should be voluntary.

But Lazar admits that peer pressure on minority students should not be underestimated when an optional course on religion is introduced. "When there is a single Jewish kid in class, chances

are high that he will join his friends at the lesson of Orthodoxy."

Other minority religious leaders — most notably Muslims — have also voiced their opposition to the introduction of the study of Orthodox Christianity into the curriculum of public schools.

The textbook on Russian Christianity was introduced last year in some Russian schools as part of an optional course on religious culture for sixth-graders.

A document from the Ministry of Education that outlined the basic elements of the course — and opened the door to the controversial textbook — was made public late last fall. The document was criticized as violating the principle of church-state separation and as paving the way for the introduction of Christianity in the country's public schools.

Education Ministry officials have defended the course, saying it was "cultural" rather than religious. Responding to criticism, Education Minister Vladimir Filippov has repeatedly stated that his agency is not going to introduce religious instruction into the public school system.

More than 90 percent of Russian schoolchildren are believed to be attending public schools.

In fact, what education officials approved is a section called Orthodox Culture. The section is part of a broader course on the History of Religious Culture that should cover all faiths with official status as Russia's traditional faiths, including Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.

In reality however, the first step made last year presented a major challenge to minorities because no religion except Orthodox Christianity prepared its own textbook to be used in public schools. Many doubt that educators would welcome a book dedicated solely to any of the minority religions.

Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, the president of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities of Russia, says Jewish groups should seek a compromise in a newly proposed textbook on Religions of the Peoples of Russia, which the Education Ministry wants to make into a standard for an optional course in public schools.

"There is a working group within the ministry that will most likely commission each of the faiths to submit their own portion of the textbook," says Kogan. "This could be an acceptable compromise to what is currently being offered."

Lazar said he would like to see the day at public schools started with a minute of silence for all the kids to reflect and contemplate on spiritual matters in their own way. He admits, though, that this would not be a satisfactory option for the Orthodox Church. □

Lawmakers file amicus brief

NEW YORK (JTA) — More than 50 lawmakers signed a brief to the U.S. Supreme Court supporting a California law that would suspend the licenses of insurance companies that don't disclose their affiliates' past Nazi ties.

"This is not only a moral issue but a constitutional issue," said Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), the lead signer of the brief. "Companies have willfully withheld the information that survivors need to recover Holocaust assets, and California regulators have every right to find that compliance is a condition for doing business in the state."

The lawmakers argue that striking down the California law would hurt Congress' ability to regulate the insurance industry. The court is expected to hear the case on April 23. □