



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon postpones trip

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon postponed his trip to the United States.

Sharon took the action to monitor security issues following a Jerusalem bus bombing Sunday that killed seven people and wounded 20. Sharon had been scheduled to depart for the United States early this week to meet with President Bush to discuss his reservations about the U.S.-backed "road map" for peace. [Page 1]

Jews escape Morocco bloodbath

No Jews were killed or injured in last Friday's suicide attacks in Morocco.

But the attacks on three targets, including a Jewish community center, a Jewish cemetery and a Jewish-owned restaurant in Casablanca, left 28 bystanders and 13 suicide bombers dead, and 100 wounded.

Officials have arrested several dozen people in connection with the blasts.

In addition to the Jewish sites, the bombers struck at a Spanish social club and a hotel.

Suspicion in the attacks is focusing on Al-Qaida or groups linked to it. [Page 3]

Couple killed in Hebron attack

An Israeli couple was killed in a suicide attack Saturday night in Hebron.

Gadi Levy, 31, and his wife, Dina, 37, of Kiryat Arba, were buried on Sunday.

In other violence, Israeli troops on Saturday night killed two armed Palestinians during an infiltration attempt of a settlement in the West Bank.

An Israeli soldier was wounded in the exchange. [Page 1]

Austrian rabbi attacked

A Chasidic rabbi in Vienna was beaten.

Austrian police say the rabbi and his three children were walking home from Shabbat prayers in eastern Vienna last Saturday when two youths shouted anti-Semitic insults, then kicked the rabbi and hit him over the head with a beer bottle, the German news service DPA said.

The rabbi, vice director of the Lauder School, was injured in the attack, though his children were unhurt, Austrian police said.

Sharon and Abbas talk, but bombings dampen hopes for any quick progress

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Efforts to revive Middle East peace talks suffered another setback this week, as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon put off a scheduled trip to Washington following a spate of deadly terrorist attacks.

At least nine Israelis were killed and dozens wounded in two weekend suicide attacks.

Seven people were killed and 20 wounded, four of them seriously, when a terrorist dressed as a religious Jew blew himself up on a city bus in Jerusalem early Sunday morning.

The attack came a day after an Israeli couple was killed in a suicide bombing in the West Bank city of Hebron.

Hamas claimed responsibility for both attacks, identifying the bombers as residents of Hebron, reports said.

A third attack shortly after the bus bombing failed when the bomber blew himself up at a roadblock north of Jerusalem, killing only himself.

The bus bombing came just hours after Sharon and his Palestinian Authority counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, held talks in Jerusalem, where both agreed that "a cessation of terrorism is a first and vital step to any progress," according to a statement issued by Sharon's office.

Yet government sources quoted Sunday by the Ha'aretz newspaper characterized the meeting as a failure. According to the sources, Israel displayed flexibility and openness, but the Palestinians rejected all proposals outright and refused to accept security responsibility "for even one centimeter of territory."

Palestinian officials agreed that the talks had failed, but blamed Sharon.

"The talks ended in total failure because Sharon insisted on discussing only security matters and refused to accept the 'road map' peace plan, a senior Palestinian official told the Jerusalem Post. "We hold Sharon fully responsible for the failure of the talks and for the upsurge in violence."

Sharon and Abbas had agreed to meet again following Sharon's visit to the United States. But after Sunday's bus bombing, Sharon's office said the prime minister was delaying his departure in order to convene urgent security and political consultations.

Sharon had been expected to discuss confidence-building gestures toward the Palestinians in his White House meeting with Bush, which was scheduled for Tuesday.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell conveyed to Israel that the United States understood his decision to delay, Army Radio reported.

Even before the wave of attacks, expectations for the Sharon-Abbas meeting had been low in light of the differences over the road map.

The Palestinians say they accept it, and are seeking a similar declaration from Israel.

Israel says it has reservations about the plan, which it wants to discuss with the United States.

The latest attacks underscored the difficulties Israel and the Palestinians face in moving from violence to negotiations.

The Palestinian Authority condemned the Jerusalem bombing and urged Israel to act with restraint.

Information Minister Nabil Amer was quoted as saying that the Palestinian Authority is committed to bring an end to attacks against civilians.

But a senior Hamas official said the attacks show the terrorist group's intention to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian killed in clashes

A Palestinian was killed and six others wounded during clashes with Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Sunday.

An 18-year-old Palestinian was killed by Israeli fire in Khan Yunis. Near the Negev town of Sderot, Israeli troops discovered an unexploded Kassam rocket, which was apparently fired several days ago.

In the West Bank, Israeli troops wounded six Palestinians during clashes with rock throwers in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus.

Strike called off

Israeli public sector workers called off a general strike.

The call came Sunday after representatives from the Treasury and the Histadrut labor federation reached an agreement regarding wage cuts and dismissals in the public sector.

No agreement was reached on pension funds, but the sides agreed to continue talks. According to the agreement, public-sector salaries will be cut by \$1 billion over the next two years.

The agreement followed a four-day general strike last week that paralyzed much of the country.

Israeli Arab mayor detained

The mayor of the Israeli Arab town of Umm el-Fahm was arrested as part of an Israeli crackdown on the Islamic Movement's northern faction.

Suleiman Agbarbiya, arrested Sunday, is the 17th Islamic Movement member to have been detained. Israeli police suspect the movement members of transferring funds raised abroad to Hamas-affiliated organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli police suspect some of the funds reached the families of suicide bombers.

Thousands of Israeli Arabs took part in demonstrations over the weekend against the arrests.

continue its activities. At the special Cabinet session called to discuss Israel's response, ministers again debated whether to exile Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. Security officials say that Arafat, who is locked in a power struggle with Abbas, continues to encourage terrorist groups to carry out attacks.

Sharon reportedly opposed exiling Arafat, saying he shouldn't benefit from red-carpet welcomes abroad.

The chief of staff of the Israeli army, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, also argued that deporting Arafat would only strengthen his standing abroad, the radio reported.

Industry Minister Ehud Olmert accused the international community, particularly the European Union, of undercutting Abbas by refusing to join Israel and the United States in boycotting Arafat.

Many European governments continue to recognize Arafat as the main Palestinian leader, preventing Abbas from building an independent power base.

As a result, Olmert told Israel TV, Abbas' government "is a paralyzed government," and "we can't even put it to the test of whether it wants to fight terror or not."

The No. 6 Egged bus was about half-full as it made its way from the outlying Jerusalem neighborhood of Pisgat Ze'ev toward the center of town just before 6 a.m. Sunday.

The terrorist, who police said was wearing a yarmulke and prayer shawl, boarded the bus and sat in the front.

He detonated his explosives belt as the bus passed through the busy French Hill intersection in northern Jerusalem.

The bodies of the dead remained sitting upright in their seats, including that of a woman with short dark hair whose head slumped back and whose legs were still crossed. One man's body, heaved by the blast, leaned from a broken window, The Associated Press reported.

Six of the dead were residents of Pisgat Ze'ev: Olga Brenner, 52; Yitzhak Moyal, 64; Nellie Perov, 55; Marina Tzitziasvili, 44; Shimon Ustinsky, 68; and Ron Yisraeli, 35. The seventh, Tawil Ghaleb, was a Palestinian from the Shuafat refugee camp, north of Jerusalem.

Four of the dead were recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Passenger Ya'acov Engelberg said he had just bent down to get something out of his bag when the bomb went off.

"When I bent down I heard an explosion. It took me a couple of seconds to understand," he told Army Radio. "What saved me was that I bent over," and "the back of the seat in front of me blocked the force of the blast."

When Engelberg straightened up, he couldn't see well because his glasses had flown off.

Still, he managed to get out the back door of the bus. The door was closed, but the glass windows had blown out.

In what police believe was a related attack, another suicide bomber blew himself up about half an hour later at a road block border police erected north of Jerusalem after the bus bombing. There were no Israeli casualties in that attack.

After the attacks, Israel imposed a full closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, barring all passage of Palestinians into Israel except for humanitarian cases.

Sunday's attack came a day after an Israeli couple, Gadi and Dina Levy, 31 and 37 respectively, were killed in a suicide attack in Hebron.

Also Saturday, Israeli troops killed two armed Palestinians who attempted to infiltrate Sha'are Tikva, a settlement just inside the West Bank.

Israel's police commissioner, Shlomo Aharonishky, linked the latest bombings to the terrorist attacks this week in Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

"There is no doubt we are facing a huge wave of terror that is global and has no borders," he said.

In another development Sunday, details were released on the arrests of an Israeli Arab cell from Jerusalem that allegedly planned to hijack an Egged bus and kidnap an Israeli soldier.

The eight cell members, all in their late 20s, allegedly received instructions from Hamas prisoners in the Ashkelon jail via messages passed on by the prisoners' relatives, Army Radio reported.

All eight suspects have Israeli identity cards, the report said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israeli ties hurt refugee in Canada

Canada is refusing to grant refugee status to a Lebanese man because of his ties to the Mossad and the South Lebanese Army.

Canada's immigration board said he was an "accomplice" to alleged Israeli war crimes, including murder and torture, in southern Lebanon.

The decision came after testimony by human rights groups against the man's request.

The man, whose name is not being released, says he will appeal the decision.

French filmmakers expelled

Two French pro-Palestinian activists suspected of having met the British suicide bombers who carried out an attack in Tel Aviv last month arrived in Paris after being expelled from Israel.

Both filmmakers, who arrived late last week, were questioned by French border police for around 15 minutes before being welcomed by a group of activists from the International Campaign for the Protection of the Palestinian People.

The two men, both in their 30s and of North African origin, were detained by Israeli police for around 72 hours as part of an investigation into the attack on Mike's Bar in Tel Aviv on April 30 in which three people were killed.

Anger at philanthropist's joke

The Orthodox group Agudath Israel of America criticized mega-philanthropist Michael Steinhardt for spoofing fervently Orthodox Jews.

David Zwiebel, executive vice president of the Agudah, voiced anger in a commentary this week over Steinhardt's appearance at an April event at which he dressed as a Chasidic rabbi, replete with caftan, shtreimel and payot.

According to the New York Jewish Week, which reported on the dinner, Steinhardt said he "spit" on his former self and predicted that "the days of Moshia-ch must be near."

Zwiebel called the act "a bizarre spectacle" and questioned how Steinhardt, "a champion of Jewish continuity," could "publicly mock the dress, language, lifestyle and beliefs" of Jews who "successfully transmitted authoritative Jewish identity and pride" through generations.

Steinhardt, a multimillionaire funder of Jewish day schools, synagogue renewal efforts and identity-building programs such as Birthright Israel, was out of the country and could not be reached for comment, said an aide, who added that the event was "old news."

Steinhardt told the Jewish Week that he had meant only to "spoon" the Orthodox, but that he had hoped to amuse "the full range of Jews."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Moroccan Jews rocked by attacks, but king promises them protection

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA)—When the Moroccan Jewish community was contacted after the weekend's deadly terror attacks in Casablanca that targeted Jewish institutions, they were asked if they wanted to leave for Israel.

"Is Tel Aviv safer?" they reportedly responded.

On Sunday, King Mohammed VI reassured Moroccan Jews that he would protect them.

Joined by Jewish and Muslim leaders, he toured the Casablanca sites hit by suicide bombers late Friday night. He told the Jewish community that the state would repair the damage quickly and would guarantee the community's safety.

Security at Jewish sites, which is provided by the state, was doubled or tripled after the attacks, sources in the community told American Jewish groups. U.S.-based Jewish groups contacted the Moroccan community, asking if they needed help.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which helps Moroccan Jewish institutions such as schools, medical services and old-age homes, "will consult closely with the leaders of the Jewish community to assess what should be further steps to maintain the rich fabric of Jewish communal life in Morocco," said JDC's executive vice president, Steven Schwager.

But the community assured JDC officials that it feels safe and doesn't need immediate financial assistance.

Of the five sites hit by bombers, four were Jewish or had strong Jewish connections: a Jewish club known as Cirque L'Alliance; a Jewish cemetery; the Jewish-owned Positano restaurant; and the Hotel Safir, a hotel popular with Israeli tourists.

Initial reports cited two Jewish sites as having been attacked. One source said "it took a while until people connected the dots and realized that the common denominator was that all the targets are across from Jewish locations" — with the exception of the Casa de Espana restaurant, the fifth site bombed.

Indeed, the Safir Hotel had nine Israeli guests at the time of the bombing and was expecting 200 more. The Israelis were in Morocco for a Lag B'Omer holiday pilgrimage to the grave of a tzaddik, or wise man.

These "were classic terrorist targets: Jews" and "tourists and foreigners," Serge Berdugo, president of the Council of the Jewish Community in Morocco, told the Moroccan news agency MAP. "The goal is put us in the spiral of international terrorism."

The attacks killed 28 bystanders and wounded 100 people. Thirteen suicide bombers died in the attacks, which are believed to be the work of Al-Qaida or a Moroccan group linked to Osama bin Laden's terrorist network.

If the idea was to kill Jews, the bombers seem to have miscalculated: After attending Friday night synagogue services, most members of Morocco's Jewish community spend Shabbat at home. No Jews were killed or injured in the attack.

The bombings are being seen as being seen as an attack on a pro-Western, moderate Arab regime — albeit one that is a police state — that has relatively decent relations with Israel and has declared its commitment to protecting its Jewish citizens.

"The bombings of the Alliance Jewish club and a Jewish cemetery" in Casablanca, "two of the targets in a series of deadly terrorist attacks, were an assault on Morocco's Jewish community, on a country friendly to the United States, and on tolerance itself," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

The king's pledge to rebuild the damaged buildings is part of the Moroccan government's stated support for the country's Jews.

The community, which stood at a robust 250,000 in 1948, has dwindled to 4,000 or 5,000 today. Young Jews often attend college abroad — as French speakers, they are comfortable in Paris or Montreal — and most do not return.

Despite the attacks, Moroccan synagogues held services over the weekend, though only a few people attended. □

FOREIGN JOURNAL

Iraq's oldest Jew provides lens onto a world of loss and loneliness

By Matthew Gutman

BAGHDAD, Iraq (JTA) — It takes 15 minutes to cajole a grimacing Muhammed Fazi, literally the gatekeeper to Iraq's dying Jewish community, to let a reporter peek into the small compound that holds Baghdad's only remaining synagogue.

Finally, Fazi cracks open the synagogue's steel door. As if on cue, out of an adjacent cement block building, hobbles the 98-year-old Tawfiq Sofer, the oldest living member of Iraq's Jewish community.

Squinting in the glare of the blaring Iraqi sun, he sizes up his visitors and grins, displaying just a few teeth, almost as thin as needles. Gaunt and wearing striped pajamas and a loosely fitted knitted cap, the ailing Sofer offers his guest a seat and a glass of water.

Haltingly and without irony, Sofer says in fluent English, "I am the youngest of my family."

He is also the last of it.

Like 90 percent of Iraq's once thriving Jewish community of 100,000, all of Sofer's family fled Iraq, either for Israel, the United States or Europe after Israel's independence in 1948.

Only an estimated 35 Jews are left in the country.

Unmarried and alone, Sofer's sole company is Fazi, who attends to the ancient man 14 hours a day, and Nidal Sa'aleh Ezra, a 28-year-old orphan the two "adopted" a few years ago.

Sofer, sometimes alone, sometimes with one or two bent septuagenarians, shuffles into the synagogue on Saturdays to pray, and to peek in at the Sefer Torah.

Like many of the remaining Jewish sites in Baghdad, the synagogue itself, in central Baghdad, is deliberately nondescript.

A grayish-brown brick wall, about 10 feet high, conceals another austere yellow brick building inside.

Its only decorative element is a set of old pine doors. Above the lintel a single word, written in black Hebrew lettering, reads "Adonai."

Beneath it, other Hebrew lettering reads: "The Synagogue of Meir Abraham Twigg."

Asked if he prays on weekdays, the ailing man swallows a glycerin tablet, leans forward on his battered cane and shoots back: "Do I pray! I pray well and properly three times a day. I even put on tefillin."

Sofer speaks fluent English, though his heart disease — which does not prevent him from smoking a cigarette after meals — makes it difficult for him to speak at length.

Fazi, who serves as guard, gatekeeper, groundskeeper, nurse and shopper, says he has dedicated his life "to this Jewish community." Fazi, whose own father, he says, is a well-to-do merchant who befriended many Jews in the middle of the century, absently taps the old man's hand as he speaks.

"I love him," Fazi says of Sofer. "He is like my father."

Reflecting on life under Saddam Hussein, Sofer says times were not easy, "but at least we had security."

After several attacks on Jewish community buildings throughout the 1990s — one Palestinian attack five years ago killed two community members and two Iraqis — the Mukhabarat, the Iraqi secret police, which had already kept close tabs on Jews here,

began to monitor the synagogue.

"We had a system by which we would call the Mukhabarat, and they would come if there was any trouble," says Fazi. But now, with Baghdad submerged in anarchy, there is no one to call in case the little compound is besieged by looters.

Once a prosperous section of Baghdad, Ba'tawin, where the synagogue stands, has become a gang stronghold. The nights crackle with gunfire and the explosion of an occasional grenade, as looters fight each other and American troops over turf.

While poor, the community looks after its own. Naji Jebrael Ya'acob, the community's leader, helps supply the needy with food and clothing when necessary, according to Sofer. Fazi says the greatest nuisance has been journalists.

"I almost came to blows with some of them," he says. "You are the first that I have let in here."

"We don't want to attract too much attention to this place, don't want people to notice," he says.

The Jews here, and their Muslim keepers, many possessed with a dash of Judeophilia, cling to their secrecy as if it were life itself.

The few dozen, aging Jews here live cloistered in neighborhoods scattered around the city. Few of their neighbors know their real identity, and that is the way many want to keep it.

Outside the synagogue compound, tea vendor Hussein Riad, 24, says he is aware of the Jews and synagogue beyond the walls.

He says he has no problem with the Jews living in the area. "They let me stay here," beside the compound wall, "so what do I have to complain about?"

By and large, the anti-Semitic chants heard around the Arab world have not marred popular demonstrations here. Only once during this reporter's three-week stay in Iraq were specifically anti-Jewish chants heard.

After demonstrations in the former Saddam stronghold of Falluja turned violent, American forces opened fire on what it believed were armed men in the crowd.

The next day, a small group of Iraqi demonstrators marched on the U.S. encampment in the area chanting, "We swear by God, we must kill the Jew."

Once a thriving cultural and mercantile center for Jews, signs of Jewish life are few and far apart in Baghdad these days.

But the Jews' historical presence is still felt.

The first Jewish presence in Mesopotamia dates back to the sixth century BCE when Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar took captive thousands of Jews and marched them back to the present-day Iraq.

He treated them well, and until the late 1940s, it was not uncommon for Muslim men to marry Jewish women. Grocers, butchers, merchants and doctors mixed freely with their Jewish countrymen. But despite the ensuing history of expulsion, several wars pitting Iraqis against Israelis and decades of Jewish life in hiding, flecks of the Jews' influence on Iraq remain.

Some ancient, crumbling Victorians buildings, all that remain of Britain's colonial legacy here, are decorated with Stars of David.

In the Shurja mercantile section of Baghdad, which suffered some of the heaviest and most violent looting during the war, the Jewish community continues to manage several buildings that were not expropriated by Saddam Hussein's government.

For his part, Sofer is lonely but destined to die here.

Asked why he never followed the rest of his family abroad, he pauses, inhales a short breath and says, "I just could never bring myself to leave my home, my country." □