

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Four Israelis killed in Gaza Strip

Four Israeli soldiers were killed and four others wounded in an attack on an army outpost near the Erez Crossing in the Gaza Strip.

Three Palestinian gunmen, who wore Israeli army uniforms, were killed Sunday in the ensuing exchange of fire.

Three groups claimed joint responsibility for the attack: Islamic Jihad, Hamas and the Al-Aksa Brigade, a group linked to Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

The infiltration came hours after Israeli troops killed an armed Palestinian on Saturday night in an exchange of fire in the southern Gaza Strip. [Page 4]

Argentina to release files

Argentina will release secret evidence related to a 1994 bombing at a Jewish community center that killed 85 people.

Argentine Jewish leaders welcomed Nestor Kirchner's announcement, which he made June 5, less than two weeks after he was elected president.

"It is the most important news in nine years," said Abraham Kaul, the head of the AMIA Jewish center, where the bombing occurred.

Argentine Jews have long pushed for intensifying investigations into the AMIA bombing and into a 1992 bombing at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 29.

Israeli, Palestinian meet

The Israeli defense minister and Palestinian minister for security affairs met to discuss implementation of the "road map" for peace.

During Saturday night's meeting with Shaul Mofaz, Mohammed Dahlan called on Israel to ease restrictions on the Palestinians and also raised other issues, including the evacuation of illegal settler enclaves, Ha'aretz reported.

The meeting came as Hamas reportedly decided to freeze talks on a cease-fire with the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas renewed its threat to carry out suicide attacks against Israel in protest over Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas' conciliatory remarks toward Israel at a summit in Jordan last week.

Palestinian Authority officials criticized Hamas' move. [Page 4]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Tensions simmering in Austria as community pushes for funding

By Ruth E. Gruber

VIENNA (JTA) — The blue-and-white banner draped above the closed door of Vienna's main synagogue bore a big star of David — and a message designed to provoke.

"Shut because of Schuessel," it read, referring to Austria's chancellor, Wolfgang Schuessel.

The banner was hoisted last week as the latest broadside in a bitter funding standoff between the cash-strapped Austrian Jewish community and the government.

The confrontation has exposed the personal dislike between Schuessel and the president of Austria's Jewish community, Ariel Muzicant. The disagreement may also be behind a spate of anti-Semitism, and has raised questions among some Austrian Jews about how their country's Jewish community should be funded.

Standing below the banner, Muzicant, flanked by European Jewish Congress President Michel Friedman, announced to reporters a list of specific cost-cutting measures that will go into effect July 1 unless the state agrees to more than quadruple its annual subsidy to Austria's Jews.

They include the closure of the local Hillel House, a "massive" cutback in religious services in the main synagogue, and a 50 percent cut in subsidies to scores of community religious, social and cultural organizations.

In addition, up to 35 community staff members — one-third of the community's paid work force — are slated to lose their jobs.

"The unimaginable is now reality," said the Frankfurt-based Friedman, who had flown to Vienna to lend support to the Austrian community. "For the first time in Western Europe, a Jewish community must begin to liquidate its infrastructure."

Muzicant announced the drastic cost-cutting measures one day after he bluntly rejected a stopgap offer from the government of an interest-free loan amounting to approximately \$800,000 a year to the community for 2003, 2004 and 2005.

The loan would be repaid from anticipated Holocaust compensation awards for assets stolen or destroyed after the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938.

Vienna's Jewish community, which numbered about 170,000 in 1938, was among the richest in Europe before the war. Today the Austrian community numbers about 7,000. The overwhelming majority are postwar immigrants and, say community leaders, some 20 percent require social assistance.

The Austrian government currently provides \$900,000 in annual subsidies to the community, about 7 percent of the community's more than \$13 million budget. Other income comes from community membership fees, donations, loans and income from real estate. State and local authorities also provide additional, separate funding for specific Jewish projects and institutions.

Muzicant has asked for an extra \$3 million a year in government subsidies "in order to guarantee Jewish life in Vienna, as well as a just restitution or compensation for community property robbed by the Nazis."

He made public the severity of the funding crisis at a May 8 news conference. In a "call for help," he asked the government for the additional annual \$3 million and demanded that assets stolen by the Nazis be returned.

The immediate cause for most of the shortfall is a \$2.3 million annual bill for bodyguards and other private security measures that supplement police and other

MIDEAST FOCUS

Settlers reviewing outposts

Israel's defense minister is expected to meet in the coming days with settler leaders to try to persuade them to voluntarily evacuate some illegal outposts.

The goal is to remove 12 illegal outposts in the West Bank that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon committed himself to removing at last week's summit in Aqaba, Jordan, the daily Ha'aretz reported.

While the settlers' initial position was that they would not negotiate over which outposts were dismantled, there were reported contacts over the weekend with officials in the Prime Minister's Office in a bid to prevent more-established enclaves from coming down, the report said.

Report: Recession Israel's longest

The Israeli economy is now in its largest recession, as a result of the Palestinian intifada. The 31-month-old intifada has also caused a dramatic increase in defense spending that has caused budget shortfalls in social services, according to the Israeli business newspaper Globes.

Teens arrested for vandalism

Five Jewish teen-agers were detained over the weekend for vandalizing or stoning Palestinian vehicles.

Two Jewish youths were arrested in Jerusalem on Saturday afternoon after they were caught throwing rocks at Arab cars. Earlier, police officers in Jerusalem detained three fervently Orthodox teens who vandalized six Arab cars.

Attempted stabbing in Jerusalem

A Palestinian youth tried to stab a public transportation security guard in Jerusalem.

The incident occurred Sunday when three Palestinian youths tried to board a bus, and were asked by two security guards to show identification papers.



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measures furnished by the government. "The state should provide this," Muzicant told JTA in an interview. "If we need security, it is necessary to protect us. It is our right to demand that the Austria state pay to protect us."

Over the past month, the standoff has been marked by a bitter exchange of barbs between Muzicant and Schuessel, who have a history of personal animosity. "They are like Sharon and Arafat," one member of the Jewish community told JTA.

At one point, Schuessel reportedly said that he was not willing to subsidize "over-the-hill" Mossad agents, an apparent reference to the security guards hired by the Jewish community.

Schuessel, through a spokeswoman, denied making the comment.

For his part, Muzicant accused Schuessel of indifference to the Jewish community's fate.

"The government is doing this deliberately," he told JTA. "They don't want to give in. They don't want to agree that they need to take measures so that the Jewish community will not disappear."

Austria, he said, "is one of the richest countries in the world. It is really a shame that it is not willing to live up to its history."

To press his case, Muzicant also took the dramatic step of filing 777 restitution claims to the state's \$300 million General Settlement Fund.

The fund was formed as part of a January 2001 agreement between the United States, Austria and international Jewish organizations to oversee compensation for Nazi theft and destruction of property.

He physically handed over 25,000 sheets of documentation in 23 boxes to the fund's downtown office hours before the filing deadline ran out May 28. These were claims for assets of Jewish associations and foundations taken after the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938.

He made clear, however, that he wanted a commitment for more government funding rather than compensation from the fund.

No payments from the fund can be made until two pending class-action lawsuits in the United States are settled.

The name-calling and public brinkmanship have dismayed some observers.

"I think it is problematic to connect the two things — the claims for Holocaust era compensation on the one hand, and the fact that the community needs money for its operations and infrastructure on the other," Eva Blimlinger, Research Coordinator of the Austrian Historical Commission, told JTA. In February, the commission issued a 14,000-page report that criticized Austria's postwar governments for their reluctance to indemnify Nazi victims.

Jewish community members also reported an upsurge of anti-Semitism, so much so that the community board issued a resolution last week condemning a spate of anti-Semitic Internet postings apparently linked to the funding spat.

"There have been a lot of online letters," said one woman, who didn't want her name used. "The openness of the to-date latent anti-Semitism is disgusting," she said. "Even with friends, there are things you stop discussing."

Some Austrian Jews have expressed concern that the community itself did not do enough to raise funds internally to help cope with the shortfall.

"If things are at such a crisis, where's the letter asking me to make a donation to the community?" said a community member, who also did not wish to be quoted by name.

"I get countless letters asking for fund raising for a variety of projects in Israel spearheaded by Viennese Jews," he said. "The community does do some fund raising and it is trying, but if this is truly the emergency it is, I haven't seen Viennese Jews being asked to pitch in."

Said another community member, who also did not want to be quoted by name, "Some of our members are really well off. It should be a challenge to us to turn around and tell the government that we will deal with this problem."

Jewish community general secretary Avshalom Hodik admitted that American-style fund raising for internal operations is not part of the Austrian Jewish tradition or mentality.

"It is still strange to us," he said. "To change a way of thinking takes years."

Still, he added, "if we had the restitution money we were supposed to get, we would be OK." □

JEWISH WORLD

Paper's apology accepted

Chicago's Jewish leaders are accepting an apology from the Chicago Tribune regarding an editorial cartoon that many viewed as anti-Semitic.

An editorial apologizing for the cartoon appeared Sunday in the Chicago Tribune, alongside a letter by Lester Rosenberg, chairman of the board of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

The paper acknowledged that the cartoon "is not just offensive. The content was wrong, dangerous and anti-Semitic," said Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Chicago federation.

The cartoon, which ran May 30, depicted a kneeling figure, presumably President Bush, laying out dollar bills on a "pathway for peace" viewed by a hook-nosed, grotesque likeness to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Arrest in Djerba shul bombing

A French anti-terrorist judge ordered an investigation into a German citizen in connection with last year's attack on a synagogue in the Tunisian island of Djerba in which 21 people were killed.

Christian Ganczarski, also known as Abu Ibrahim, was arrested Tuesday in Paris after arriving in France from Saudi Arabia. Ganczarski has admitted to police investigators that he had been in regular contact with the suicide bomber responsible for the April 2002 attack, Nizar Nawar, who he called 40 minutes before the attack on the synagogue.

Jewish lawyer to defend Rudolph

A Jewish lawyer will defend white supremacist Eric Rudolph in his upcoming trial for bombing an abortion clinic in Alabama.

Court-appointed lawyer Richard Jaffe said Rudolph, arrested earlier this month for four bombings, told NBC's "Today" show June 5 that Rudolph is not anti-Semitic.

Rudolph is believed to have ties to the Christian Identity movement, which believes that non-Jewish Europeans are God's chosen people, and others, including Jews, blacks and Asians, are inferior.

Intifada exhibit taken down

A photo exhibition of the Palestinian intifada was withdrawn from a city hall in northern France after officials said it contained pictures that "legitimized terrorist acts," the Liberation daily reported Saturday.

Municipal officials in Lille inspected the photographs and asked for some of the images and accompanying captions to be removed describing them as "often violent" with "the potential to shock."

The exhibitors chose to withdraw the whole exhibition.

New Orthodox group in Russia hopes to attract Israeli rabbis

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Leaders of a new Orthodox rabbinical group are hoping to ensure an influx of Orthodox rabbis to Russia.

The group, the Federation of Orthodox Jews of Russia, formed at a three-day congress held recently at a Moscow synagogue, hopes that increasing Jewish knowledge and lifestyle among Russia's Jews will help them entice Israeli Orthodox rabbis, hit by the economic crisis at home, to come to Russia.

The organization adds to the already fractious mix of Jewish organizations in Russia today.

Reform Jews "and Chabad are making great strides" in Russia, Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi and one of the group's leaders, told JTA, but the Orthodox movement "is left behind."

Of the few dozen rabbis living and working in Russia today, approximately three-quarters are believed to be representatives of the worldwide Chabad Lubavitch organization, which operates through the umbrella Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

While most of the Reform congregations have learned to live without permanent rabbinical guidance — there are only two ordained Reform rabbis in the Russia — the movement's Russian arm, the Union of Religious Organizations of Modern Judaism in Russia, is credited with creating a viable network serving Reform Jews in some 30 Russian cities. Goldschmidt and his supporters — who include a few dozen, mostly local-born Orthodox rabbis, among them Adolph Shayevech, one of Russia's two chief rabbis — believe this is a good time to reach out to the largely assimilated Russian Jews with the message of traditional Jewish values.

Why today? The situation in Israel is the key, Goldschmidt explains.

"Because of a dire economic crisis in Israel, many Orthodox Jews who had long been relying on state support cannot find that support in Israel anymore," he said.

"One of our goals has always been to find qualified people who could come and work" in Russia as rabbis, says the Swiss-born Goldschmidt, who has lived in Russia for nearly 15 years.

He says the Israeli crisis could turn into a blessing for Russian Jews.

"There are now hundreds of people, some 70 to 80 percent" of Israeli rabbinical students, "who are desperately looking for jobs," he said.

Goldschmidt predicts an "exodus" of rabbinical graduates to countries with large Jewish communities, and he hopes to attract some of them to Russia. The creation of the new rabbinical organization also is a result of an ongoing communal split between leaders representing Chabad-Lubavitch and the non-Chasidic Orthodox leadership.

The success of Chabad — a fervently Orthodox group that has become synonymous with mainstream traditional Judaism in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union — is widely attributed to the movement's funding and its ability to enlist dozens of young, energetic rabbis to work in Russian provinces where other groups have failed to establish a permanent rabbinical presence.

If it is successful in attracting new rabbis from Israel and elsewhere, the new group will break this pattern, Goldschmidt hopes. "If in the past only the Lubavitchers were going off the beaten track, we now expect within three to four years to have more and more rabbis willing to come and work in various places," he said.

But a spokesperson for the Lubavitch-led Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia told a Moscow daily that "any organization can call itself what it wants, but this would not change its essence."

The comment was a reference to the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Unions of Russia, an umbrella group that includes traditional Orthodox and Reform congregations. Most of those who attended the recent conference are affiliated with the congress.

"I would suggest that this organization look not for a new name but rather for new ways of work," a press liaison for Berel Lazar, the leader of the federation, told the Nezavisimaya Gazeta newspaper recently. □

As U.S. pushes for 'road map,' there's an outbreak of violence

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A fresh round of violence has threatened the diplomatic progress made at two Middle East summits last week, posing a challenge to the U.S.-backed "road map" for peace.

At least five Israelis were killed and five others wounded in separate incidents in the Gaza Strip and West Bank on Sunday.

The attacks came after Israel reimposed a total closure on the West Bank, citing a high number of warnings of terrorist attacks, Israeli Army Radio reported.

U.S. officials urged Israel and the Palestinians not to let extremists set the diplomatic agenda, but the weekend's events showed the difficulties in following up on the steps taken at the summits in Egypt and Jordan.

In the Gaza Strip, four soldiers were killed and four others were wounded when three gunmen dressed in Israeli army uniforms infiltrated an army position near the Erez crossing.

The gunmen were killed in the ensuing exchange of fire.

An inquiry showed that the three attackers had slipped into a line of Palestinian workers entering the Erez industrial zone — and under cover of a heavy fog, crossed a fence and wall separating the industrial zone from the nearby army position.

After reaching the entrance to the outpost, they opened fire and threw grenades at a soldier standing outside, killing him.

They then shot and killed two soldiers on guard duty at the outpost gates.

The gunmen then entered the outpost and opened fire on the soldiers, killing one and wounding four others.

Soldiers in the base opened fire, killing the three. Duct tape and plastic handcuffs were found on the bodies of the attackers, raising the possibility that they had intended to kidnap soldiers as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian security prisoners, Army Radio reported.

Three of the soldiers killed in the attack were reservists: Sgt. Major Assaf Aberjil, 23, and Sgt. Maj. Udi Ayelet, 38, both of Eilat, and Sgt. Maj. Chen Engel, 31, of Ramat Gan. Also killed was Sgt. Maj. Boaz Emet, 23, from Beit She'an.

In other violence Sunday, an Israeli was killed when two gunmen opened fire near the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Israeli troops killed at least one of the attackers. Earlier in the day, a border police officer was lightly wounded by a Palestinian gunman at a nearby checkpoint.

Three groups claimed joint responsibility for the attack — Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Brigade, which is linked to the Fatah faction of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

The Gaza attack was seen as a direct challenge to Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who angered some groups by his conciliatory remarks at the summit with President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Aqaba last week.

Accusing Abbas of conceding on Palestinian demands, Hamas froze cease-fire contacts with the Palestinian Authority and renewed its vow to carry out suicide attacks against Israelis.

Reuters quoted Abbas as telling reporters in Ramallah that dialogue is the only way to achieve Palestinian interests. He also called on Palestinian opposition groups to renew contacts with the Palestinian Authority.

Israel, meanwhile, called on the Palestinians to immediate take steps to crack down on terrorism.

Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim of the Likud told Israel Radio that the attacks prove that Palestinian terrorist groups are "not yet ready to accept this process," referring to the road map, drawn up by the "Quartet" of the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia.

Also on Sunday, Cabinet minister Effi Eitam called on the government to cease all contacts with the Palestinian Authority until it takes steps to fight terrorism.

Israeli President Moshe Katsav urged that the road map be given a chance to succeed.

But he said Abbas has a limited amount of time to take action, Israel Radio reported.

In the wake of the attacks, U.S. officials urged the sides not to let extremists undermine the opportunity for peace. In media interviews, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said such actions by opponents of the process were expected, and the United States remained committed to advancing the road map.

"This is the time when both leaders have to do everything they can" to move forward on the road map, Powell told "Fox News Sunday."

Powell also said Sharon is expected to live up to his commitments, and remove illegal settlements.

Meanwhile, the Israeli prime minister was on the defensive Sunday night, facing a torrent of criticism from Likud Party convention members for adopting the road map.

In remarks interrupted by boos at the International Convention Center in Jerusalem, Sharon declared that most of the Israeli public supports the path he had taken.

"The people have spoken and brought us to victory," he told party activists. "They chose this path."

Sharon also said that in negotiations with the Palestinians, Israel would not yield on its rejection of the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees or on any of the reservations to the road map that the Israeli government had when it endorsed the diplomatic initiative.

Before Sharon spoke, Cabinet Minister Uzi Landau accused the prime minister of capitulating to terrorists.

He said the road map would only increase the violence.

In another development, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz reportedly met with the Palestinian security affairs chief, Mohammed Dahlan, on Saturday night to discuss implementing the road map.

Dahlan was quoted in the Israeli media as having asked that Israel further ease restrictions on the Palestinians. □

Terrorist abettor sentenced

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An eastern Jerusalem resident was sentenced to six life terms Sunday for helping a suicide bomber in an attack last fall that killed six people.

Zair Ashraf transported the suicide bomber who blew himself up on a bus on Tel Aviv's Allenby street last September, wounding more than 80 others in addition to the deaths.

Ashraf was also convicted of giving a ride to another suicide bomber whose attack was thwarted when security guards on the Tel Aviv beachfront spotted him. □