



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Bush skeptical of cease-fire**

President Bush says he is skeptical that Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups are serious about a cease-fire with Israel.

"The true test for Hamas is the complete dismantlement of their terrorist networks," Bush said Wednesday at a news conference in Washington.

Bush's remarks came amid reports that Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigade have agreed to a three-month cease-fire on attacks against Israel.

Some officials with the groups and the Palestinian Authority denied the reports.

### **Israeli strike kills two**

Israel killed two Palestinians in a strike in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli sources said Wednesday night's helicopter strike, which injured 16, was aimed at a Hamas cell that was preparing to launch Kassam rockets into Israel.

A Hamas member, Mohammed Masri, reportedly lost his leg in the attack.

In other violence, two Hamas gunmen were killed and an Israeli soldier was wounded in an exchange of fire in the northern Gaza Strip.

The clash erupted Wednesday as the two were trying to plant a bomb along the security fence, Israel Radio reported.

Meanwhile, Palestinians fired a Kassam rocket at the Negev town of Sderot on Tuesday. There were no injuries, but a parked car was damaged.

### **Sharon to make U.S. tour?**

Israel's prime minister may visit American Jewish communities to help federations raise money.

During the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors meeting in Jerusalem, Sharon told leaders of the United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Agency on Monday that he was amenable to the idea of visiting large Jewish communities in North America to boost the federations' campaigns, according to Alex Grass, former budget and finance chair of the Jewish Agency, who attended the meeting.

The UJC, which raises funds through nonbinding recommendations to its member federations, has struggled to raise projected funds for its overseas partners.

## **In Iraq visit, Jewish officials find perils remain for Baghdad's Jews**

*By Uriel Heilman*

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the bombs started raining down on Baghdad in late March, most Jewish anxiety was focused on Israel, which had been the target of Iraqi missiles during the first Persian Gulf War.

But for a very small group of Jews in the Middle East, the danger was from American bombs.

Those Jews — the remnants of Baghdad's once thriving Jewish community — are now the focus of a new welfare effort by international Jewish organizations, whose reach is extending into the Iraqi capital for the first time in decades.

Now that the smoke has cleared and Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime is gone, Baghdad's Jews are tasting freedom for the first time.

Many are finding it fraught with peril.

"They're very, very wary," Rachel Zelon, vice president for program operations at the New York office of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, said upon her return Monday night from a weeklong trip to Baghdad. She spoke to JTA from a hotel in Amman, Jordan.

"They've been alone and isolated for over 30 years, and now all of a sudden people keep knocking on their doors," she said. "They're very reluctant to open up because of the various circumstances that they've lived under for so long."

"They are very secretive about the fact that they're Jewish," Zelon said.

There are at least 34 Jews left in Iraq's capital, about half of them elderly. Long-time residents of the city, many of them are poor and lack basic needs such as clothing, medication and food — not to mention Jewish ritual objects.

Zelon and a senior official from the Jewish Agency for Israel, Jeff Kaye, sought to address those needs in the Iraqi capital last week. Kaye, who is the director of financial resource development and public affairs at the agency, brought the Jews prayer books and tefillin, among other things.

Zelon helped them obtain household items like sheets, towels, clothing and insulin.

The trip had special significance for Kaye: His wife's parents are Iraqi exiles who came to Israel in 1951.

"For many years, I've heard stories from my mother-in-law about how she and her family were humiliated and stripped of all their possessions and thrown across the border just because they wanted to go to Israel," he said.

Kaye brought back photographs and video footage to Israel to show to his mother-in-law.

Zelon, who works in Manhattan, said the trip to Iraq was among the most remarkable she has undertaken for HIAS.

It took her several days of travel to arrive in the war-torn Iraqi capital, making the final leg in an overland convoy from Amman.

The scene on the Jordanian side of the border was chaotic, she said, with thousands of trucks idling, hundreds of Iraqi refugee families trying to get back home and several columns of Chevrolet Suburbans filled with members of the foreign press and international workers.

The Iraqi side, by contrast, was orderly, patrolled by American soldiers who seemed glad to run into fellow Americans.

They deluged Zelon with phone numbers of their loved ones, asking her to contact them upon her return to America and assure them that the servicemen were safe overseas. Perhaps the most dangerous part of the trip was the run down the lawless, six-

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Terror attack averted

Israeli police arrested two Palestinians with a large bomb in the Israeli Arab town of Kafr Kassem.

The two were apprehended Wednesday after a security alert was declared in the central region amid intelligence warnings that two Palestinians on their way to an attack had infiltrated Israel from the West Bank. The bomb was detonated safely.

### Ex-SLA soldiers to patrol buses

Some members of the former South Lebanon Army will become anti-terror guards on Israeli buses. An Israeli spokesman said that members of the now-defunct militia have training that will help them prevent attacks.

Some 7,000 people — former soldiers with the Israel-allied SLA and their families — left Lebanon in May 2000 after the Israeli withdrawal.

Approximately 750 former SLA soldiers and their families currently live in Israel, according to the Israeli government.

### Outpost tents removed

Israeli soldiers removed two tents Wednesday that had been erected by settlers at a West Bank outpost near Hebron.

Settlers said they had established two other outposts overnight, Israel Radio reported. In another development, settlers from the Shavei Shomron outpost reached a compromise with the army over dismantling the outpost.

### Israel protests Olympics boycott

Israel is protesting an Arab boycott at the Special Olympics.

The Saudi indoor soccer team didn't show up for a match against Israel, and an Algerian table tennis player failed to show up with his paddle for a match against an Israeli.



## Daily News Bulletin

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lane highway from the border to Baghdad.

Vehicles frequently are targeted by armed bandits and hijackers, and Zelon's convoy traveled at speeds in excess of 90 miles per hour to avoid trouble.

Baghdad itself, Zelon said, seems to have suffered as much damage at the hands of Iraqis as at the hands of American soldiers, and gunfire is common.

"Everybody has a gun. You're in the street and all of a sudden there's gunfire and you don't know where to hide," Zelon said.

The chaos in Baghdad has been worrisome for the city's Jews.

"There is a paradox regarding their security," Kaye said. "Even though under the very cruel Saddam Hussein regime they were persecuted and had property confiscated, they were generally protected. Now," the postwar instability "could lead to serious questions regarding their safety."

While the Jews face no direct threat at the moment, they are laying low. For many families, only their closest neighbors know they're Jews, Zelon said.

Some of those neighbors are Muslim or Christian friends who for years have helped the community's older members survive.

A few, but not all, of Iraq's Jews plan to leave to join relatives in England, Holland or Israel.

But it could be a while before they get there: Iraq's Jews don't even have passports.

For now, Zelon said, Jewish organizations will focus on helping the community survive.

The assistance she offered during her trip to Baghdad "was a Band-Aid," Zelon said. "It was really a fact-finding trip. There are needs that need to be addressed. Let's find out first and foremost how they are, what they need right now. I think it's premature to say anything about emigration."

Zelon was scheduled to meet Kaye in Israel this week to discuss next steps.

The Jewish Agency and HIAS say they are working together on the project.

"We are two organizations that work in tandem on a wide variety of projects," Kaye said.

"For the Jewish Agency, as a global Jewish organization, it was very important for us to bring the message to these people that there is a very large Jewish community that supports them."

World Jewry largely has been powerless to help Iraqi Jews over the past half century.

Though Baghdad's lone synagogue, Meir Tweig, today counts less than three dozen Jews, the city has a rich Jewish history. About 90 percent of the country's Jews were expelled or fled in the wake of Israel's founding in 1948.

Those who remained in Iraq — once the thriving center of Diaspora Jewry — were subjected to regular harassment.

During the Saddam era, many local Jews saw their property confiscated and precious community heirlooms seized by Saddam's secret police, the Mukhabarat.

Shortly after the war, American forces stumbled upon a treasure trove of Jewish artifacts in the basement of the bombed Mukhabarat headquarters.

The basement was flooded, so American authorities froze the objects to protect them from further decay and summoned officials from the U.S. National Archives to deal with the find.

Jewish officials are being briefed on developments, and Kaye and Zelon were taken to view the artifacts while they were in Iraq. For the time being, the fate of the artifacts, like that of Iraq's Jews, remains unclear. □

## Tourism to Israel up in May

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Tourism to Israel increased by 36 percent in May over the same period last year.

Some 82,600 tourists visited the country last month, according to government statistics.

Overall, tourism to Israel is down 6 percent compared with last year during the first five months of this year.

Some 316,700 tourists visited Israel between January and June 2003. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Nazi charge spurs Net ruling

Allegations that a woman was a descendant of Nazis sparked a U.S. court ruling that a person who distributes a third party's e-mail cannot be sued for libel over its contents.

This week's decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals was seen as a victory for Internet free speech. It involves a Dutch handyman who says he overheard a client say that a certain Dutch woman was the granddaughter of Hitler's Gestapo chief, Heinrich Himmler, and that paintings in her home might have been stolen from Jews, Reuters reported.

The handyman e-mailed an official at the Museum Security Network in Amsterdam via its Web site, saying the artworks were "the rightful legacy of the Jewish people." That official forwarded the e-mail to hundreds of museum security officials. The woman, who denies the charges, sued the Netherlands National Museum for defamation, but lost.

### For Diaspora Jews, Zionism 101

Israel will invest in Zionist education abroad.

The decision was made Monday at meetings of the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors involving representatives of the agency, the Israeli government and Jewish communities around the world.

The projects, which will be managed by Israel and the Jewish Agency, are intended to "counter the worrisome trend of assimilation" of young Jews abroad and "connect them to Israel and to the idea of aliyah," said the agency's chairman, Sallai Meridor. "The Jewish people are assisting us in our aliyah efforts, in building the State of Israel and molding its society, while the State of Israel is a partner in saving the next generation of the Jewish People and bringing them to Israel."

Israel will allocate \$10 million to the project in 2004 and increase the amount by \$10 million in each of the next four years.

### Neo-Nazi band prosecuted

Three members of a German skinhead rock band were charged with spreading hate.

The musicians were charged Tuesday with forming a criminal organization that promulgated hate through their songs. The title song of one of their albums called for bombing Israel. The men face a maximum of five years in prison.

### Site boosts European museums

A Web site has been launched linking Jewish museums in Europe. The site, [www.aejm.org](http://www.aejm.org), is the site of the Association of European Jewish Museums. It provides information on and links to more than 70 Jewish museums in nearly 30 European countries.

## Closure of Israeli consulates in Brazil leaves Jews dismayed

By Marcus Moraes

SAO PAULO, Brazil (JTA) — First it happened in Rio de Janeiro. Now it's happening in Sao Paulo.

In the space of less than a year, Israel has decided to close its two consulates in Brazil. Its embassy in Brasilia, the capital, will remain open.

The latest consulate closure, in Brazil's largest city, is generating considerable concern among Sao Paulo's 60,000 Jews, who represent half the Jewish population of South America's largest country.

Many of them did not even know of the impending closure until the newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* published an interview recently with the Israeli consul general in Sao Paulo, Medad Medina. Medina said he was told of the official decision by telegram.

"Jews and Israel will be underrepresented without a consulate in Sao Paulo," said Rabbi Henry Sobel, a leading Jewish figure in the country and spiritual leader of Brazil's largest synagogue, the 2,000-family *Congregacao Israelita Paulista*.

Compounding general anxiety about the closure is the sense among community leaders that Israel will be ill-equipped to promote its interests in a city that is the hub of Brazil's Muslim community, estimated at 1.5 million people.

The president of the Sao Paulo State Jewish Federation, Jayme Blay, sent Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a letter urging him to reconsider the consulate's closure, slated for July.

The letter made note of the so-called "triple frontier," the place where Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet, which is considered a hot zone of terrorist fund raising and activity.

"We think a city with so many Arabs and descendants, after September 11, and with the danger for Israel and for the Jewish people of the frontiers between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, deserves a consulate of the State of Israel," Blay wrote.

For the purposes of "lobbying and public relations, one essential piece, is the consulate of the State of Israel," he said in the letter.

Sobel echoed Blay's sentiments.

"The Arab community in our city is very strong and most of the Arab countries — Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, for example — have consulates in Sao Paulo," he said.

"The recently elected president of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, has taken a very public and outspoken position in favor of the Arabs in the Middle East," Sobel said. "This is a time for Israel to open more consulates in the country, not to close down the only one that is left."

Sobel, a Reform rabbi known for his interfaith activism, said he did not expect anti-Semitism in Brazil to rise.

He added, "An Israeli consulate is not a luxury which can be dispensed with because of financial considerations. Whatever is saved in terms of money will be lost in terms of public opinion."

Many Israeli consulates and missions around the world are being closed, largely due to budget cuts. According to a recent interview with a spokesman of Israel's Foreign Ministry, David Saranga, published in *Folha de Sao Paulo*, the Sao Paulo consulate is one of 20 slated for closure.

In a sign of the consulate's importance to the Jews of this city of 20 million, some are suggesting that local community members bankroll the consulate's operation.

"Our community has important institutions and powerful businessmen," said David Neto, a board member of Sao Paulo's Jewish federation and the *Hebraica* club, a Jewish association.

"They might be able to raise the needed funds to keep our consulate working by reducing all expenses to a minimum threshold," he said. "Keeping the Israeli consulate working is keeping a piece of Israel right beside us. It's a very important defense against our enemies, who will now feel more comfortable to attack us."

Ricardo Berkiensztat, vice president of the Jewish federation in Sao Paulo, said he doesn't think the community's efforts to keep the consulate open will succeed.

"Reaction is growing, but it seems unfruitful," Berkiensztat said. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

## Israeli security fence going up, but it's a lightning rod for criticism

By Matthew Gutman

TEL AVIV (JTA) — An austere monolith of reinforced concrete, the 25-foot-high wall that separates parts of Israel from the West Bank conjures images of the Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall or even the Great Wall of China.

But some Israelis fear that the wall — part of a security barrier that will have electronic fences, ditches, patrols and high-tech monitoring devices — may bear a greater resemblance to the Maginot Line, the fortification France built in the 1930s to protect itself from German assault.

That supposedly impregnable line of defense failed to protect France from German attack in 1940.

The Middle Eastern wall, being built to protect Israel from Palestinian infiltration and assault, already has failed.

Last week, Palestinian terrorists managed to crawl through a sewage tunnel underneath the barrier near the Palestinian city of Kalkilya, cut through steel grating and make it to Israel's Highway 6, where they shot dead Noam Leibowitz, a 7-year-old girl in a passing car.

Only small sections of the fence actually will include a wall, in areas where Palestinian towns and cities come so close to the fence that Palestinians could shoot at Israelis nearby.

Called the "security fence" by the military establishment and the "separation fence" by many others, the barrier has been assailed in the press and by some right-wing politicians as a white elephant — a costly obstacle unable to thwart determined terrorists.

Yet this is hardly the first time the \$200 million, 100-mile-long fence has come under political fire. Ever since the Cabinet gave the nod to contractors to begin their massive excavations last July, the fence has served as a lightning rod for controversy.

It runs roughly along the contours of the Green Line, which demarcates the boundary that separates Israel proper from the West Bank, captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War. At certain points, however, the fence is slated to cut east into the West Bank to protect large Jewish settlements.

The Palestinian Authority has charged that the fence is the first step in the establishment of a border that would create a Bantustan-style Palestinian state, with isolated communities in non-contiguous territories at the mercy of the Israeli army.

Palestinians living along the Green Line also have accused the Israeli government of stealing their lands to clear a path for the fence — though they have been compensated for their losses.

For their part, Israeli settlers fear the fence could one day isolate them on the Palestinian side of an international border. Though Israel says the location of the fence is temporary and could be moved after a final peace agreement, many believe the fence will establish the de facto border of a future Palestinian state, which most settlers vehemently oppose.

"We've opposed the fence since it was first debated in the government almost two years ago," said David Wilder, a leader of Hebron's Jewish community. "It is a de facto political determination — in fact a border — which only radiates weakness to the Arabs. And, as the last few weeks have shown, it does not stop terror."

One should not build a fence to fight against terrorism, he said.

"The only way to prevent terror is to uproot it where it starts, in Palestinian cities," Wilder said.

Put simply, the underlying principle behind the fence is physical separation: us here, them there.

"Between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean live 10 million people," Israel's former prime minister, Ehud Barak, said at a conference last week that examined the failures of the July 2000 Camp David summit.

The land between the river and the sea can "either be a Jewish state or a democracy," Barak said. If Israel annexes the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Palestinians are not given the vote, he said, "then Israel will be an apartheid state."

In his 90-minute speech, Barak slammed the current Israeli government for dragging its feet in building the wall.

He said that had the wall been built sooner — plans for the fence were explored as early as 1994, under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin — then an additional "500 people could have been walking among us today."

Dozens of local Israeli leaders whose communities are situated close to the Green Line have been making the same argument. Some, like Danny Atar of the Gilboa Regional Council, have said the Sharon government's delays in building the fence constitute criminal negligence.

Defense Ministry sources contend that the fence's construction is a Herculean task.

"It's like building a superhighway on tough terrain under constant attack," said Netzach Mashiach, the Defense Ministry's project manager of the Seam Line Construction.

Over the past 11 months and despite a bitterly cold and wet winter, Defense Ministry officials said, contractors have excavated 15 million tons of earth, replaced it with millions of tons of gravel, sand and concrete and laid the groundwork for a "dead zone" stretching 65 yards on either side of the fence.

Besides the millions of dollars worth of electronic equipment required to monitor movement along the fence, the ministry is to install 310,000 square yards of metal fencing and 1,000 miles of barbed wire.

Military sources interviewed at the site of last week's terrorist shooting said the project has been hampered by frequent Palestinian sabotage.

"We lay down a stretch of 100 meters of fencing and they steal or destroy 50 of it," one source said.

Looters also have been stealing everything that is not bolted down — and much that is, they added.

Mashiach says a fence is only as good as the forces that monitor it and the intelligence units that provide the Israeli army with alerts.

"Every obstacle can be infiltrated if it is not properly patrolled and maintained," he said.

The fence's failure to save the life of last week's young casualty is not due to faulty construction, but to the fact that the fence is not yet complete, Mashiach said.

The day after the attack, the sewage tunnel under the fence near Kalkilya still had not been fitted with electronic monitoring systems. There were no soldiers posted in the guardhouses set up every 500 yards along the 1,300-yard wall. Army patrols were sporadic.

The fence is slated for completion in early July, according to Mashiach, though he said he wouldn't be surprised if it was "a few days" late. □