



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 81, No. 193

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli strike kills several

Israeli helicopters killed several Palestinians in strike Monday night in the Gaza Strip. The attack on a car was the latest in a series of airstrikes during the past 24 hours. Several passers-by also were wounded in the strike near the Boureij refugee camp. [Page 4]

Three soldiers ambushed

Palestinian gunmen linked to Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement killed three Israeli soldiers in the West Bank. Sunday night's ambush outside Ofra, which also left a fourth soldier seriously wounded, was claimed by the Al-Aksa Brigade.

Noting that the gunmen were believed to have fled to the Palestinian Authority president's headquarters in nearby Ramallah, Israeli Cabinet Minister Yisrael Katz called Monday to review the option of exiling the P.A. president. [Page 4]

Rabbi attacked near Paris

A rabbi was attacked near his synagogue in the Paris suburbs. Michel Serfaty, rabbi of the Ris Orangis Synagogue, was on his way to Shabbat prayers last Friday night when a car approached and a number of youths began shouting racial insults at him. He was then hit across the face by one of them and was lightly injured.

Two men have been detained by police and are being investigated for what police termed "a racially motivated attack." Investigators said the men had yelled "Yid" and "Palestine, Palestine will smash your face in."

Visiting the synagogue on Sunday, Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF organization of French Jews, described the attack as "unacceptable and worrying for the future of French society."

The attack was also strongly condemned by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who said he would visit the synagogue in coming days.

Bush slams Mahathir

President Bush reportedly told off Malaysia's prime minister for saying that Jews rule the world. Bush made the comments to Mahathir Mohammad during an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok on Monday, Bush spokesman Scott McClellan said.

Mahathir later defended his comments.

AMERICA DECIDES 2004

Domestic issues trump foreign in views of many Arab Americans

By Ron Kampeas

DEARBORN, Mich. (JTA) — The imam finished his sermon — a parable about a corrupt emir and a flea — but had one more thing to tell his congregants, crammed shoulder to shoulder on the floors of the mosque in this depressed Rust Belt town.

A senior officer in the Pentagon has equated Islam with Satanic ritual, Imam Hassan Qazwini told his congregation, the largest in the city, and congregants must phone, fax and e-mail the White House to demand the officer's dismissal.

"We have to speak up," Qazwini said in Arabic-accented English. "You have the power, brothers and sisters, to make a difference."

Such an appeal — unimaginable just a decade ago — marks a watershed in the political maturity of the American Arab community.

Immigrants from Arab lands who once thought speaking out was a waste of time at best, and an invitation to hostility at worst, are giving way to a second generation that has found its voice.

"I see the depth of political commitment among my following, especially the youth," the Iraqi-born Qazwini told JTA. "We cannot isolate ourselves in this society. We are participants in this society."

A conference of the Arab American Institute over the weekend, which drew hundreds of Arab Americans, was as proudly Arab American as is this town. Arabic neon signs line broad, busy roads here, competing for attention with billboards touting Wendy's hamburgers, sex toys and drinking emporiums.

And along with the pride comes growing political influence for this country's growing Arab community. Qazwini, for instance, was the clergy representative selected to open the 108th session of the U.S. Congress.

The perceived electoral consequence of Arab and Muslim Americans, and their concentrations in swing states like Michigan, drew a roster of top politicians from both parties to the conference here last weekend.

Among them were seven of the nine Democratic candidates — an unprecedented show of political deference to the community estimated to number between 3 and 4 million nationwide.

"Our issues are the nation's issues; the nation's issues are ours," James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said Friday, capping the conference's first day. "The country our children will grow up in is different. We have crossed the threshold."

Singled out for special attention were a dozen Arab Americans holding or running for political office, from those on local councils to Gary Nolan, who is running for president on the Libertarian ticket.

The symbolism was overpowering for some.

"I want my boys to know that they can be the next president of America," said Itedal Shalabi, a social worker who deals principally with Arab Americans.

Shalabi, an immigrant from the West Bank who wears a traditional scarf, drove four and a half hours from Chicago to attend.

What the burgeoning influence means for U.S. foreign policy, especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was a principal focus of the conference. Indeed, the most common question for the candidates was how they intended to force Israel to dismantle the security barrier Israel is building in the West Bank.

Some national Jewish organizational officials have noted increased political activity

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon rips unofficial accord

An unofficial Israeli-Palestinian peace plan is a "boost to terrorist organizations," Ariel Sharon said.

Speaking Monday at the opening of the Knesset's winter session, the Israeli prime minister said the "Geneva accord," reached earlier this month by Israeli and Palestinian figures who do not hold public office, is a way for Palestinians to duck their obligations under the "road map" peace plan.

Wolf waiting for new P.A.

The United States' envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is staying in Washington until a new Palestinian Authority government is formed.

John Wolf, whom President Bush named earlier this year to monitor Israeli and Palestinian compliance with the "road map" peace plan, has been in Washington since the beginning of the High Holidays, a State Department official said.

Grass-roots peace plan

A grass-roots Israeli-Palestinian peace plan has gathered thousands of signatures from both sides.

Ami Ayalon, former head of the Israeli Shin Bet security service and Sari Nusseibeh, formerly the Palestinian Authority's top Jerusalem official, released the news regarding their plan as they visited Washington this week to meet with congressional representatives and State Department officials.

The plan outlines two states separated along pre-1967 borders, a divided Jerusalem and no "right of return" for Palestinian refugees.

Three other members of the PLO's mainstream Fatah faction also are in Washington meeting with congressional officials.

The Ayalon-Nusseibeh plan is distinct from another unofficial peace plan negotiated this month, known as the "Geneva accord."

on the part of Arabs in the United States, but they say those efforts will have little effect on foreign policy.

"They have been spending a lot of money and a lot of time organizing, including candidates for city council and on up," said Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "U.S. foreign policy is driven by U.S. interests. People look at issues objectively and see what Israel stands for, America stands for."

In heated hallway discussions, another theme emerged from many of the conference participants: How important are conflicts an ocean away to a generation of Arab Americans trying to assimilate into an American culture they have come to love?

"The elders have the wisdom of our traditions, but our future is here," said Jordanian-born Wafa Aborashed, who is running for a local council seat in San Leandro, in northern California. "This is where we live. When we go overseas, we're not identified as Arabs. We're identified as Americans."

Naraman Taha, a colleague of Shalabi, the Chicago social worker, said, "There is an identity crisis, the younger generation does not want to be identified as Arabs. We're proud of our heritage, proud to be Muslim, but we want to assimilate."

For Arab Americans, the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and their aftermath constituted a watershed event.

"Sept. 11 was a wake-up call for Muslims, because we realized if you were not involved, it would move against you," said Eide Alawan, an assistant to Imam Qazwini.

The moves by Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Patriot Act helped unite a community long divided on all but the Israel-Palestinian issue, community activists say.

Tales of arrests and detention without legal consultation, and the prospect of federal agents dropping into mosques to listen to sermons, lent Arabs and Muslims who never gave a second thought to domestic issues an issue to rally around, said Muqtedar Khan, a social scientist at Adrian College in Michigan. Khan tracks Muslims in America.

"They saw what can happen when things go bad," Khan said. "Who will protect their rights?"

Sept. 11 also spurred many American Arabs and Muslims to feel the same rage at being attacked that their compatriots did, Khan said. "Sept. 11 put the 'American' in Muslim American," he said.

Many Arabs say Sept. 11 also helped throw their sense of Americanness into relief.

"No other country, much as we criticize it, is as wonderful," Shalabi said.

That new sense of belonging has led many Muslims and Arabs to consider other domestic issues not often considered a high priority by Arab Americans. Young Muslims have set up study groups to develop political positions on such issues as abortion, genetic engineering and gay rights.

Some cast such outreach as a strategy to advance issues dear to Arab Americans — especially when addressing what many Arab Americans consider to be a lack of balance in the Middle East.

"Don't just focus on Arab American issues," Jim Shaer, a former adviser to Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), told a workshop on political outreach. "If you talk about other issues, the elected official will pay more attention to you."

Others say the bread-and-butter issues are fast becoming the point.

"We can't be the foreign policy people solely," said Marwan Kreidie of Philadelphia. "Make sure we're involved in the health care debate, the jobs debate."

Shalabi said the number of clients she has who lack healthcare has appalled and politicized her. Learning about health care has led her to examine — and care for — other hot-button issues.

"I'm a local issues guy," said Kamal Nawash, a Jerusalem-born candidate for the Virginia Senate. "You can't get far focusing on international issues alone. To appeal to the heartland of America, you have to assimilate."

Earlier, in his sermon in the older mosque, Imam Qazwini referenced a phrase from Americana as he exhorted his congregants to political action.

"Like it says in the thing of allegiance, what is it?"

"A pledge," one congregant murmured.

"The pledge of allegiance," Qazwini said. "Liberty and justice for all."

He read out the telephone number to White House's complaint hotline. "Write this down," he said. □



Daily News Bulletin

Norman H. Lipoff, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

After fierce debate, scholars to meet to discuss NJPS' value

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Spurred by fierce debate in the press, Jewish social scientists are organizing a conference on the controversial National Jewish Population Survey so they can study it for themselves.

In late October, dozens of scholars will gather in Boston with officials of the NJPS 2000-01, Jewish federations and community policy makers to scrutinize the \$6 million study, which is the costliest and most extensive survey ever taken of American Jewry.

"The discussions that have been in the newspapers have been less than satisfying," said Leonard Saxe, director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, which is co-sponsoring the meeting. "The hope is to get everybody together to see if we can come to some kind of agreement" about what the NJPS means, he said.

The answer to that question has been the focus of intense debate since NJPS' release last month.

The debate was highlighted by an Op-Ed column in The New York Times by J.J. Goldberg, editor of the Forward, who accused the study's sponsors of spinning a statistical "myth" of population decline.

In his own paper, Goldberg called the NJPS a "fraud" for allegedly skewing the population and intermarriage rates, needlessly alarming the Jewish community over what he called an inflated intermarriage crisis and a nonexistent population decline.

His broadsides spawned dueling commentaries in American Jewish newspapers and in Israeli media outlets such as Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Post.

Stephen Hoffman, CEO and president of the UJC federation umbrella organization, denied that his group had manufactured fears of a population decline. Goldberg's criticism "stuck in my throat," Hoffman told JTA. The Times Op-Ed was akin to "slander" against the UJC, he said.

How Jews count themselves, and the conclusions they draw from those numbers, has been a matter of debate since biblical times. The last NJPS, in 1990, made headlines with its finding that 52 percent of Jews who had married in the previous five years had married out of the faith. That survey sparked more than 200 studies and at least 11 books, and steered a decade's worth of communal spending on efforts to promote "continuity" among committed Jews and "outreach" to uninvolved Jews.

Billed as a "colloquium," the conference on the current NJPS is set for Oct. 26-27 at Hebrew College in Boston and Brandeis University, in Waltham, Mass. Some who will attend said it's still too early for serious discussion about NJPS because few have pored over the details.

"People have started pontificating, when we don't have the data to make judgements yet," said Rela Mintz Geffen, president of Baltimore Hebrew University.

The NJPS is no stranger to controversy. After suddenly pulling the survey last fall because of lost data, the UJC launched an internal probe and an independent audit, both of which found methodological flaws and potential statistical problems.

Since NJPS came out last month, discussions among Jewish social scientists and demographers have focused on the charges and countercharges surrounding the survey.

Another co-sponsor of the conference is the Wilstein Institute at Hebrew College. Rabbi David Gordis, director of the institute and president of Hebrew College, said the gathering intends to avoid media hype.

The goal is to study NJPS "in a quiet, reflective, analytical way" rather than "in a sensationalized way," Gordis said, "because there has been so much attention to controversy — everything from the amount of money spent on it to the methodological issues."

Lorraine Blass, NJPS' project director, said UJC officials would attend this month's conference with the hope of avoiding yet more fireworks.

"My starting point is that this is an extraordinarily complex project, a lot has been said about it over time from many quarters — not just in the press — and we feel discussion is healthy and will ultimately promote a better understanding of its findings and its broad use," Blass said. □

Mending branches?

Presidential candidate Howard Dean conducted his first major meeting with U.S. Jewish leadership Friday. The Vermont governor miffed some Jews last month by saying America should approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with more "evenhandedness."

He visited the sukkah of Manhattan's Lincoln Square synagogue to shake hands with children before his first major meeting with about 25 Jewish communal leaders, Dean spokesman Eric Schmeltzer said.

The "fact that there is this meeting shows he wants to listen," said the synagogue's rabbi, Adam Mintz. "I think he needs to hear from Jewish leadership that" his Middle East position is "problematic," because Israel is "responding to terrorists" when it carries out military measures against the Palestinians.

Fine for hate speech in France

A priest and a Catholic congregant in Paris were fined for defamation and racial hatred after writing that Jews are "transnational financiers."

Abbe Guillaume de Tanouan and Claude Rouseau were ordered to pay nearly \$3,500 each by a court in Paris, the daily Liberation reported. They also were ordered to pay a symbolic fine to the League of Human Rights. Both belong to the Saint Nicolas de Chardonnet Church in Paris, which is popular with the French extreme right.

Berlin Jewish elections clarified

Recent elections in the Berlin Jewish community were canceled because there were two different kinds of ballots, a community spokesperson said. Earlier reports had suggested possible ballot manipulation. No date has been announced for new elections for the president and board of the community.

Swiss right wingers gain

A far-right party earned its highest share of votes ever in Switzerland.

The Swiss People's Party, which received the largest percentage of votes in a Swiss election in 70 years, is projected to have captured 55 seats in the 200-member National Council, 11 more than it previously had in the lower house of Parliament.

The party also could have two seats — it currently has one — in the seven-member Swiss Cabinet after Sunday's vote. The party's Basel-district president, Angelika Zalonari, told JTA, "Last year we published a call against anti-Semitism and also against a call of an Islamic group to boycott Israeli products, and I am ready to do it again."

In recent months, the party has been the only one to complain that Switzerland's Foreign Ministry is anti-Israel.

Bombing of U.S. convoy in Gaza overshadowed by newest violence

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. officials are learning the hard way what Israel long has known: When Palestinian Authority officials promise to do their utmost to fight terrorism, it can be far from satisfying.

P.A. security officials met with the FBI team investigating last week's murder of three U.S. security men in a roadside bombing in the Gaza Strip. The P.A. officials briefed the FBI team on their investigation, but wouldn't let the Americans visit those arrested in connection with the attack, let alone interrogate them.

The three guards were killed and a U.S. Embassy official was wounded Oct. 15 when a 220-pound bomb was set off by remote control under a Chevrolet Suburban traveling in a U.S. diplomatic convoy near the Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanoun.

Palestinian security forces arrested seven suspects a day later. At least three of them were associated with the Popular Resistance Committees, a terrorist organization composed in part of disenfranchised P.A. members.

The group sometimes has challenged the rule of the Palestinian Authority, but both Palestinian and Israeli sources said the members arrested in connection with the convoy bombing have strong ties to P.A. security services. Such ties are typical among sponsors of terrorist attacks.

The arrests came after U.S. officials criticized the Palestinian Authority for its actions since the bombing, the first to target Americans since the Palestinian intifada began three years ago.

After the bombing, President Bush said, "Palestinian authorities should have acted long ago to fight terror in all its forms."

The Popular Resistance Committees denied any role in the bombing, as did all other Palestinian terrorist groups, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas, whose bombings have killed U.S. citizens in the past.

"We consider our fight to be solely with the Zionist enemy, and we do not want to be involved in controversial secondary issues," the Popular Resistance Committees said in a statement.

The day of the bombing, the former U.S. envoy to the Middle East, Dennis Ross, told a Senate subcommittee that Hamas and Hezbollah probably helped in the attack.

Just days later, discussion of the bombing was overshadowed by further deadly developments in the region.

Gunmen from the Al-Aksa Brigade, the terrorist wing of P.A. President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, killed three Israeli soldiers in the West Bank on Sunday. Palestinian militants also fired six Kassam rockets at Israeli settlements on Sunday.

Those attacks brought renewed calls for Arafat's ouster, including remarks by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Sharon said the world gradually is becoming convinced that Arafat must be removed from power, especially after "he brought down the Mahmoud Abbas government, and he continues to undermine Ahmed Karia's attempt to establish a serious government." The references were to the former and current P.A. prime ministers, respectively.

Just a few days before, Sharon had suggested a softening of Israel's position, telling the Jerusalem Post that expelling Arafat "would not be good for Israel."

Israel's defense minister, Shaul Mofaz, also announced over

the weekend that if Karia remained as prime minister rather than resigning, as he has threatened, Israel would be interested in renewing negotiations with his government.

Mofaz's remarks were a departure from the initial disinterest Israeli officials showed following Karia's appointment in early September. In any case, such sentiments seemed destined to be overshadowed by renewed violence.

Mofaz decided to mobilize several hundred reserve soldiers to bolster the Israel Defense Forces after terrorists threatened renewed attacks following Israel's weekend military operations in Gaza. Hamas leaders vowed to stage an attack of such magnitude that it would "shake Tel Aviv."

Meanwhile, Israel followed up attacks on Israeli settlements and on IDF soldiers with a series of airstrikes in Gaza on Monday, killing several people. At least two of those killed were Hamas members, Ha'aretz reported.

Israeli officials said the Hamas members were involved in producing and storing weapons, The New York Times reported.

The IDF has stepped up its operations in Palestinian areas since Islamic Jihad carried out a suicide bombing in Haifa on Oct. 4, killing 21 people.

Israeli officials say Arafat seems more concerned about diplomatic maneuvering than about taking any concrete steps against terrorists.

This week, a delegation of Palestinians flew to the United States to press their case against Israel. The group was headed by Palestinian legislator Hatem Abdul Kader, who said the main purpose was to discuss Israel's security fence and construction in Israeli settlements.

Observers said the unspoken subtext was to convince U.S. officials that the Palestinians are interested in peace, despite Arafat's weak response to the bombing of the convoy.

Another P.A. official, Foreign Minister Nabil Sha'ath, suggested over the weekend that U.S. officials commit troops to the region. In a speech in San Francisco, he said the presence of U.S. troops would lead to a sustained cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians.

Sha'ath is considered a candidate to become P.A. prime minister if Karia follows up on his threat to resign in two weeks.

Israel rejects proposals to send foreign troops to the area, saying they won't stop clandestine groups of Palestinian terrorists and only will complicate Israel's anti-terror measures. □

Israel defends fence at U.N.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel blasted Arab states during a U.N. General Assembly debate on Israel's security fence.

Israel was one of 15 nations addressing resolutions criticizing the fence and calling on the International Court of Justice in The Hague to rule on the fence's legality. Gillerman referred sarcastically to a Security Council resolution last week calling for the fence's destruction, which was vetoed by the United States.

"If the council cannot surrender to the dictate of one of the parties to the conflict, better to demand an immediate vote, express outrage and run to the assembly than negotiate a more balanced text," he said.

Gillerman listed eight points in defense of the fence, calling it an "effective nonviolent" means of preventing terrorism and noting that it is not intended as a border. □