



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 81, No. 216

Friday, November 21, 2003

86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Turkish Jews threatened

A Turkish terrorist group claiming responsibility for Saturday's synagogue bombings in Istanbul publicly threatened Jews. In a letter publicized on Turkish television Thursday, the group blamed Jews for poisoning Muslim society and threatened Turkey's chief rabbi, Isak Haleva, the Jerusalem Post reported. They also wished "Dirty Jews a peaceful Shabbat."

Istanbul hit again

Israel evacuated its consulate in Istanbul after a second pair of bombings in less than a week. The two attacks on Thursday hit a building owned by the London-based HSBC bank in Istanbul and the British Consulate in the city.

The bank bombing did not appear to target the Israeli Consulate, which is located nearby, Israeli diplomatic sources said. At least 25 people were killed in the attacks, which came days after the bombing of two Istanbul synagogues killed 24 people.

Resolution presses Bush on Iran

A bipartisan resolution circulating in Congress calls on President Bush to "use all appropriate means to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons."

The resolution, which is unlikely to be heard until next year, recommends diplomatic pressure on European countries and Russia to cut ties with Iran should the Islamic republic fail to prove that it isn't developing nuclear weapons. A House resolution has been circulating since October, and a Senate resolution was launched last week.

Jewish Agency passes budget

The Jewish Agency for Israel passed its annual budget, which reflects a 10 percent cut from last year.

The roughly \$300 million budget, which does not include funds designated by North American federations for specific projects, was agreed upon Thursday by the group's board of governors in Jerusalem.

The group cut the budget both to streamline the agency and in anticipation of an expected drop in funds from the North American Jewish federation system, which is facing difficulties in its own fund-raising campaign. Cuts were made in such areas as personnel — with 50 employees and 25 overseas emissaries slated to be fired — and financial support for Israeli nonprofit groups.

NEWS ANALYSIS

As Qurei gets down to business, hopes rise for peaceful progress

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Sobered by what they see as past policy errors, Israeli, American and Palestinian leaders are determined to help the new Palestinian Authority prime minister, Ahmed Qurei, succeed where his predecessor failed.

Success would mean defusing the three-year-old Palestinian intifada and creating conditions for a new peace process based on the U.S.-sponsored "road map" plan.

Few of the main protagonists are overly optimistic about the outcome, but officials on all sides say they are determined to do better than they did during Mahmoud Abbas' brief tenure as P.A. prime minister this summer.

Israel seems ready to make farther-reaching peace moves, the Americans are exerting more pressure on Israel, and the Palestinians are looking to lay the basis for a more serious peace process.

Moreover, Israeli, American and Palestinian leaders all have their own reasons for wanting to make the process work this time.

In a series of meetings with their Palestinian counterparts, senior Israeli officials have intimated that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is prepared to offer Qurei more than he offered Abbas.

The Americans also believe they could have done more for Abbas, and they have been signaling to both sides that if Qurei takes steps against terror, they will lean on Israel to reciprocate.

"If there is any sign that Abu Ala is serious, we might try to make the Israelis do something to make it worth Abu Ala's while," a senior American official told JTA, using Qurei's nom de guerre.

For his part, Qurei knows that if he manages to keep a lid on terrorism, he'll be rewarded. With Sharon signaling a more conciliatory policy and the Americans ready to pressure Israel, Qurei is trying to shape a cease-fire agreement that would stop all Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians — settlers and residents of Israel proper alike — and soldiers.

In return, Israel would sign on to the cease-fire and suspend all military activity against Palestinian terrorists, including targeted killings. Qurei believes that Abbas' biggest mistake was to initiate a Palestinian cease-fire that did not commit Israel to stop its anti-terror moves.

Sharon has indicated that this time he is ready to accept a mutual cease-fire, even though terrorist organizations might exploit it to regroup.

Sharon also is said to be considering offering a bold new peace proposal, including an idea for Palestinian independence beginning in the Gaza Strip, to be followed by the establishment of a Palestinian mini-state in Gaza and 50 percent of the West Bank sometime next year.

Sharon is expected to meet Qurei soon, with the focus on the cease-fire, release of Palestinian prisoners and easing of restrictions on Palestinian movement.

It's not clear how many, if any, of his bolder ideas Sharon will put on the table in that first meeting.

Sharon has good reasons for wanting to take the process forward.

For one, he finds himself under growing domestic pressure.

The Likud Party's relative failure in recent local elections suggests a degree of public disaffection with Sharon's party. Analysts attribute much of this to the economic

MIDEAST FOCUS

Armed Palestinian killed

Israeli soldiers killed an armed Palestinian in the Gaza Strip on Thursday. The man reportedly was crawling toward the settlement of Netzarim when he was shot.

Red Cross moves toward Israel

The International Committee of the Red Cross is taking steps to advance membership for Israel's relief agency. The Red Cross is promoting Magen David Adom's inclusion in the federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.

In a meeting Wednesday in Switzerland, the committee's vice president, Jacques Forster, told leaders of the World Jewish Congress that the committee has prepared a resolution allowing member countries to place a symbol of their choice inside a red diamond. That would address Muslim countries' objections to the red Star of David, the symbol of Israel's national emergency response organization.

The move doesn't resolve the impasse over Magen David Adom — because of ongoing Muslim opposition, Switzerland isn't yet prepared to call a convention of the national federations to approve the resolution — but the International Committee of the Red Cross move is an important step forward, Elan Steinberg, a special adviser to the World Jewish Congress, told JTA.

Israel's military erred

The Israeli military admitted that it misled the public about the type of missile used in a deadly raid in Gaza.

Thursday's statement by the Israeli army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, did not divulge the classified weapon that killed 10 Palestinians in the Nuseirat refugee camp on Oct. 10, but admitted that the official account — a helicopter-launched Hellfire tank-busting missile — was wrong.



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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slump that many Israelis link to the ongoing violence and the government's failure to come up with a strategy to stop it.

Moreover, Sharon's lack of a long-term peace plan has been highlighted by two non-governmental peace proposals making the rounds: the "Geneva accord," in which Israeli and Palestinian moderates propose a detailed model of a final agreement; and the "People's Voice" principles framed by former Shin Bet security chief Ami Ayalon and Palestinian intellectual Sari Nusseibeh, which has been signed by about 100,000 Israelis and 60,000 Palestinians.

Both initiatives were well received in Washington, with Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Defense Minister Paul Wolfowitz going out of their way to praise them — and, by implication, implying that Sharon could do more.

Then, late last week, four former heads of the Shin Bet, including Ayalon, berated the government for not doing enough to reach a peace deal, which they said was dragging Israel toward catastrophe.

To silence his critics, Sharon is said to be preparing a major policy statement to follow the one he delivered in Herzliya before elections last January. Already dubbed "Herzliya 2," the statement will give a better idea of just how far Sharon is prepared to go in peacemaking.

In the meantime, the Foreign Ministry is working on ideas to ease tensions. Proposals could include expanding the Israeli-Palestinian industrial area near the Erez checkpoint between Israel and the Gaza Strip, providing medical aid to Palestinian hospitals, and launching projects for Christmas tourism in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Most of all, though, Sharon seems to have been influenced by behind-the-scenes U.S. pressure. For weeks now, the Americans have been pressing Israel to lift closures of Palestinian areas, transfer Palestinian tax funds and dismantle settlement outposts.

Israeli officials believe the strong American messages were prompted partly by the U.S. imbroglio in Iraq. The subtext was that Israel's tough anti-terror measures don't help America's already-complicated position in the Arab world.

Conversely, the officials said, the Americans believe progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track could help them in the Arab world, as the United States could claim credit for delivering Israeli concessions.

For their part, American officials are skeptical about Sharon's intentions. There was a palpable shift in attitudes toward Sharon after Abbas' fall in September.

For months, the word in Washington has been that while Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat was the prime culprit in Abbas' demise, he was not solely to blame. Sharon could have done far more to help the struggling P.A. prime minister establish his leadership.

Qurei, who is considered a more accomplished political operator than Abbas, is trying to build the popular support for his peace moves that Abbas lacked.

He argues that what is hurting the Palestinian people most is the "chaos" caused by intifada violence and retaliation. A cease-fire would enable Qurei's government to transform the quality of everyday Palestinian life.

Moreover, Qurei has embraced the Geneva accord as a model for a final peace deal. The Palestinians always have been reluctant to enter into peace talks with Israel without knowing what a final peace deal would look like.

Now Qurei can point to Geneva, or something very close to it, as the goal. □
(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

Swiss to meet Jews

NEW YORK (JTA) — Swiss officials will meet with leaders of the country's Jewish community to discuss measures against anti-Semitism.

Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey made the announcement Wednesday in a meeting with leaders of the World Jewish Congress and the European Jewish Congress. Calmy-Rey said the government would consider not only security measures but also educational activities and additional anti-hate legislation.

The Jewish leaders asked Calmy-Rey to instruct Swiss ambassadors to help stop the dissemination to Europe of fiercely anti-Semitic materials from the Arab world, according to Elan Steinberg, a special adviser to the WJC. □

JEWISH WORLD

'Gold Train' Internet database

Holocaust survivors from Hungary can now surf the Web to find property allegedly stolen by the Nazis and later seized by U.S. forces. The Web site, www.hagens-berman.com/goldtrain, has pictures and descriptions of the personal effects seized by U.S. forces when they captured a Nazi train laden with Holocaust booty stolen from Jews.

The personal property from the "Gold Train" was never returned to the Jews, and a lawsuit that relies on classified documents is under way to recover the assets, which the lawsuit claims were appropriated by members of the U.S. Army.

A September 2002 court ruling waived the United States' sovereign immunity in the case, allowing the lawsuit to go forward.

Ethiopian deal progresses

The push to bring to Israel some 20,000 Ethiopians who claim Jewish ancestry is gaining steam.

The Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors announced that the agency would share the costs of the operation.

"We all better be prepared to put this issue on our budget radar screen," board member Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein said. Eckstein told a Jewish Agency subcommittee on immigration and absorption that the agency is cooperating with the government to help bring the Ethiopians to Israel.

The deal will cost the agency tens of millions of dollars per year. The deal, in which Israel will determine a certain number of Ethiopians eligible for aliyah and the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee will take over operation of the refugee camps where they live in Ethiopia, is being pushed by Jewish federations in North America.

U.S. Jews, Turks mourn

Jewish and Turkish Americans will join to mourn victims of this week's terrorist attacks in Istanbul. The Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations are to hold a memorial Thursday evening at Adas Israel Congregation in Washington. In Chicago, the Jewish and Turkish communities rallied Wednesday night.

Former JTA managing editor dies

Rifka Rosenwein, a former managing editor of JTA, died of cancer at the age of 42. Rosenwein, of Teaneck, N.J., began her journalism career as a JTA intern. She later worked at The Wall Street Journal, American Lawyer, Brill's Content and Inc. magazines.

Most recently, she chronicled her personal life as a suburban wife and mother — as well as her battle against a rare form of cancer — as a monthly columnist for The New York Jewish Week.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Germany drops land claims in major Holocaust restitution case

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Heirs of a German Jewish family that once owned some of the most valuable real estate in Berlin are a big step closer to what they consider justice.

The German government announced Tuesday that it would relinquish its claim to properties that once belonged to the Wertheim family.

The announcement signified a "breakthrough," but not the end of the story, for the former Wertheim properties in the former East Germany, said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

There are major hurdles to overcome before heirs receive just compensation for the vast and spectacular properties that once made up the Wertheim department store chain.

The most significant challenger is the Karstadt department store company, which claims to be the rightful post-war heir.

But the Claims Conference, and Gary Osen, a New Jersey-based lawyer for some of the heirs, disagree. Heartened by the latest development, they say Karstadt should follow the lead of the German government and drop its claims to the properties.

"We really welcome what the German government has done," Taylor told JTA in a telephone interview from New York. "We had spoken with the highest levels of the German government on this issue, and it really makes a tremendous difference. It throws the focus right onto Karstadt. We are urging Karstadt to do the right thing."

Osen told JTA he regarded the announcement "as a very positive first step. But at the same time we obviously recognize that there are still many unresolved issues, and at the moment there is no clear path to an end result."

Contacted by Reuters, a Karstadt spokesman declined to comment. Karstadt still uses the Wertheim brand and wants the family to drop a lawsuit filed against it in New York as part of any settlement, Reuters reported.

The case is one of the last major unresolved property disputes in reunified Germany, and involves properties that today are in prime locations.

For example, visitors to the new Potsdamer Platz — a modern, if somewhat loud, new commercial complex in the area where the Berlin Wall once stood — see several large empty lots, apparently abandoned. One is used by a company that hawks rides in a hot-air balloon, which rises and descends over the site of a former Wertheim property.

There may be numerous property disputes in the former East Germany today, but this one is the most significant, Taylor said.

"The properties are unique, partly because of their value and partly because of their symbolism," he said. "The name Wertheim is synonymous with pre-war German-Jewish life, and with life in Berlin in general."

Osen, who represents about one-fifth of the Wertheim heirs, said, "There are obviously thousands of still unresolved properties, but what makes Wertheim unusual is the sheer magnitude of the figures involved and the location of the property."

"Wertheim owned tremendous amounts of land in the very center of Berlin, so the history of Wertheim and its property is a microcosm of the history of Berlin itself," he said.

The wealthy family was forced to sell its property during the "Aryanization" process under the Third Reich. In addition, many prime properties were bombed during the war.

In 1951, the Karstadt company bought up the former Wertheim shares from heirs that had escaped Nazi Germany. The Communist government then nationalized the properties located in East Germany. Some remained part of the no-man's land around the Berlin Wall. Only one original building still stands.

After reunification, the Claims Conference applied for restitution of the property as the successor organization. The German Restitution Authority declared these claims valid, but both Karstadt and the German government contested the decision.

Members of the Wertheim family claim that Karstadt deliberately cheated them, paying some \$5,000 for property that Karstadt claimed was worthless but knew was hugely valuable. The heirs thus dispute Karstadt's claim to be the rightful successor.

The property is estimated to be worth several hundred million dollars today. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Taking the lead on key issues,
Santorum gets Jews' attention***By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It seems that with nearly every hot-button issue for the Jewish community these days, Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) is leading the debate.

But he isn't always representing the views of the Jews.

Take Nov. 5, 2003. On the same day that Santorum stepped out on the Senate floor to blast the Ford Foundation for its support of Palestinian groups that disseminate anti-Semitic rhetoric, he also stood behind President Bush as he signed a ban of "partial-birth abortions" even in cases where a mother's health is at stake.

On one issue, he was the Jewish community's advocate. On the other, he took a position many Jews see as adversarial.

Santorum, a religious conservative who chairs the Senate Republican Conference, has formed a surprising alliance with a wide range of American Jewish organizations. And he has become increasingly available to them to use his position in the Republican leadership to shepherd key legislation on their agendas through the Senate.

But while many Jewish organizational leaders are grateful for his efforts and interest, many are also wary of a lawmaker who diverges from their positions on some of the most important policy issues of the day — including abortion and faith-based initiatives.

The complexity of Santorum's relationship with the Jews is best illustrated by glancing at the senator's calendar for last week.

On Monday, Nov. 10, he was in New York speaking to the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, promising to work for the O.U.'s top legislative priority — a bill that would require employers to allow their workers to wear religious garb and take off for religious holidays.

The next day, he was leading the debate in the Senate to impose sanctions on Syria, because the country harbors terrorist organizations and attempts to develop nuclear weapons.

The Syria Accountability Act, a foreign policy priority for many Jewish groups, passed the Senate with only four "no" votes and is expected to be signed by President Bush before the end of the year.

But then he was back on the Senate floor overnight midweek, leading two all-night debate sessions aimed at confirming a group of federal judges whose confirmations are being held up by a Democratic filibuster.

The appointments are opposed by some Jewish groups, who see the justices as hostile to affirmative action and civil rights.

Jewish organizational leaders in Washington say they know Santorum parts with them on many key issues, but they still are grateful that he is reaching out to them. He has scheduled regular meetings with a broad group of Jewish organizations, across the religious and political spectrum, to touch base and exchange views.

"I think every group in the room knows that they disagree with him on other issues," one Jewish organization official said of these meetings. "But they are there and they are talking to him," the official said, on the condition of anonymity. And "there's a lot of love in the room during those meetings."

For his part, the senator says the meetings are about consensus building, a major part of his role as caucus chairman.

"When you're out there, working on an issue, you're looking

for folks that will be with you," he told JTA the evening of Nov. 12, between trips to the Senate floor for the all-night debate.

Santorum has found that support, at varying times, from across the Jewish spectrum.

Many Jewish groups, for instance, are rallying around the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment Act, a Santorum initiative to give tax breaks for charitable giving by individuals and corporations. The bill, passed in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, is awaiting a conference committee to work out differences in the bills.

And his support for pro-Israel legislation, like the Syria bill, is welcomed.

But more often, Santorum has gotten the backing of only a handful of conservative Jewish groups, most notably the Orthodox Union.

"I'm in much more agreement with the O.U. than many Christian denominations," Santorum, who describes himself as an "Orthodox Catholic," said in the interview. "When it comes to how we live our lives, there is very much common ground."

Santorum sought and received the O.U.'s support for faith-based initiatives, a controversial Bush administrative plan to give federal funds to religious groups that engage in social-service programming.

That endorsement was significant for the bill's backers, given that many Jewish groups and other liberal organizations were decrying it as a violation of the separation of church and state.

The legislation did not pass, but it seems to have sealed a bond between the O.U. and the Republican leadership.

It was the partnership on faith-based issues that led Nathan Diament, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs, to ask for Santorum's aid on the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, the O.U.'s top legislative priority.

Santorum almost immediately became the bill's Republican sponsor.

The legislation has gone nowhere for years, but Diament is confident it could move next year. Having a non-Jew leading the charge is a benefit, Diament said.

"It's good politically for it not to be a Jew," he said, echoing the view of most Jewish groups lobbying for legislation.

But while it is nice to have a non-Jewish lawmaker take an interest in their issues, insiders say, some Jews are skeptical about getting support from such a staunch religious Christian.

Some suggest that Santorum's motives may be part of a larger effort to garner Jewish support for the Republican Party. Or at the very least to show the GOP in a better light to Jews, in an attempt to quell some of the vast donations that Jews consistently send to Democrats and liberal causes.

"He is a politician in all the crass senses," said one Jewish organizational official, echoing the view of many.

But, the official said, Jews must take their support where it can be found.

Santorum says that crafting alliances on different issues with different people is part of playing politics. He pointed to Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who bitterly opposed Santorum's position on the abortion debate but co-sponsored the Syria bill with him.

"I don't like the idea that we are courting the vote," Santorum says of the Republicans' work with the Jewish community. "We are sharing our beliefs on how to create an America that is prosperous and free." □