

## IN THE NEWS

## U.N. group targets Israel

The U.N. Commission on Human Rights scheduled a special session to discuss Israel's assassination of Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

The Geneva-based commission, which meets for six weeks each spring, voted Tuesday to hold the session Wednesday.

Jewish groups were crafting a written statement in response to the meeting.

## Bush: Israel has the right to self-defense

Israel has a right to defend itself, but must consider the consequences of its actions, President Bush said.

Bush was asked Tuesday to comment on Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

"Any country has a right to defend itself from terror," he said. "Israel has the right to defend herself from terror, and as she does so, I hope she keeps consequences in mind as to how to make sure we stay on the path to peace."

Bush said he still supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was sending a high-level team to the Middle East next week to "keep the process alive."

## Rantissi is named as successor to Yassin

Abdel Aziz Rantissi was named to replace the late Sheik Ahmed Yassin as leader of the terrorist group Hamas.

"We will fight them everywhere. We will hit them everywhere. We will chase them everywhere. We will teach them lessons in confrontation," Rantissi, a doctor, said of Israel while accepting the post during an outdoor demonstration in Gaza.

Immediately after the rally, Rantissi, 57, went into hiding to escape possible assassination by Israel. Israel, which killed Yassin on Monday, has threatened to take out all of the terrorist group's top leadership.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Washington asks whether Yassin's killing will complicate U.S. plans

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — The death of Sheik Ahmed Yassin will pave the way to Palestinian moderation, Israel and its friends in Washington say.

But others, including Bush administration officials, are worried that the road just got a lot bumpier.

The United States scrambled Monday to reassure the world — and particularly Hamas — that it had no foreknowledge of Israel's predawn assassination of the Hamas leader in Gaza.

"The consequences of this action, in terms of raising tension and making it harder to pursue peace efforts — those are things of concern to us," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, calling the killing "deeply troubling."

The White House ultimately concurred, after initially affirming Israel's right to defend itself.

The law of unintended consequences, which has dogged other recent major Israeli initiatives, had struck again: An attempt to stem terrorism instead had sparked in Washington and European capitals a fear of revenge attacks.

Administration insiders described Monday as a day in which Boucher started by contemplating a mild rebuke, then toughening it as European and Arab countries expressed alarm and concern that the attack would strengthen Hamas and not weaken it.

"It's like a starfish: You cut off one leg, another grows in," one administration official said. "We're expecting alerts to go up everywhere."

By Tuesday, CNN was quoting an Iraqi cleric as calling on Muslims to "unite against Israel," raising the prospect that Yassin's killing could hinder U.S. efforts to disengage from Iraq by sparking more violence there.

After Hamas reportedly threatened to broaden its attacks beyond Israeli targets, European Union foreign ministers said in a statement that the killing "has inflamed the situation."

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan "strongly condemned" the killing and said he was worried that "such an action would lead to further bloodshed and death and acts of revenge and retaliation."

The U.N. Security Council called a meeting for Tuesday to discuss the assassination.

Especially aggravating, U.S. officials said, was the prospect that the assassination would scuttle the possibility of a new peace initiative from next week's Arab League summit.

U.S. officials also were frustrated because they see the attack as undermining support for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank, which they support.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom had planned to spend Monday in Washington describing plans for the withdrawal and probing U.S. proposals to contain Syria and Iran. Instead, much of his time was spent explaining the Yassin killing.

A senior Israeli official traveling with Shalom said the concerns about destabilization in the region were unfounded. The Palestinian Authority is well equipped to deal

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with Hamas, the official said, noting that the authority has 22,000 men under arms in the Gaza Strip, as opposed to about 1,000 loyal to Hamas.

"Whatever the pictures show you — the protests, the riots — it won't influence what's happening in Gaza," he said.

Israel's friends on Capitol Hill agreed. Democrats, mindful of election-year pressure to outflank Bush on support for Israel, took the initiative.

Presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) was on vacation, but a spokesman said Yassin's history couldn't be ignored.

"It's important to remember that Sheik Yassin was responsible for organizing dozens of deadly terror attacks in Israel," Mark Kornblau told JTA.

Democratic Reps. Eliot Engel and Anthony Weiner of New York, and Shelley Berkley of Nevada, issued statements supporting the strike on Yassin. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) told a United Jewish Communities gathering Tuesday in Washington that Americans should stand up for Israel's right to defend itself, "including going after those who direct" terrorism.

Officials at pro-Israel groups minimized the administration criticism and said they didn't expect it to last.

"The administration is even more concerned than the Israelis that the disengagement go through and that Hamas not take control of Gaza, and any action the Israelis take to prevent that happening, they support," said one.

"The more the leaders of Hamas are running for cover," the official said, "the less likely they are to be undermining someone like Mohamed Dahlan," a former P.A. security official and a relative moderate in Gaza.

Efraim Halevy, a former chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, said moderate Arab nations might suffer unrest in the short run but also would benefit down the road.

"The less leaders there are who support and who champion violence as a method of pushing policy, the more the chance there will be more moderation in the region," Halevy told reporters Tuesday in a conference call.

Halevy also said concerns that Hamas would now aim attacks at U.S. targets were unfounded because such attacks would open the group up to direct U.S. retaliation.

"It would expose Hamas to the kind of pressures it has not had until now," he said.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he expected the criticism to dissipate, especially given U.S. actions to pursue Al-Qaida leaders.

"It should not be 'troubling' that we go after Yassin," he said. "Then we would have to be 'troubled' by the effort on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to go after Osama bin Laden."

Some analysts wondered if Sharon was losing control of events.

"Is Sharon once again being the great tactician and the terrible strategist?" asked David Mack, a vice president at the Middle East Institute and former assistant deputy secretary of state for Near East affairs.

It's a charge that Sharon has fought for decades. Fairly or not, he is known as the general whose tactical brilliance won crucial battles in the 1973 Yom Kippur war, and the defense minister who plunged Israel into a strategic morass in Lebanon in 1982.

Whatever Sharon's intentions when he announced his plan to uproot settlements and leave Gaza and parts of the West

Bank, they have been overtaken by the intentions and actions of others.

The United States is pressing Israel hard for far-reaching concessions in the West Bank as well as Gaza; the Palestinian Authority is seeking to build bridges to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, terrorist organizations that Israel reviles; and Egypt wants to rewrite the 1978 Camp David peace accords, a precedent Israel wants to avoid at all costs.

Part of Sharon's problem, associates say, is his penchant for playing his cards so close to his chest. Only three or four officials are privy to what shape the withdrawal will take.

Members of Sharon's Cabinet who have been kept in the dark say such steps are far-reaching and require consultation.

"It's very unusual that the prime minister is pushing forward a plan in Washington that the prime minister did not bring to Cabinet, to the coalition," Housing Minister Effi Eitam said in an interview last week in Washington, where he was lobbying against the withdrawal. "It is totally improper as far as how a democratic country should be handled."

A similar secretiveness by Sharon in plotting Israel's security barrier last year led to a breakdown in U.S.-Israel communications. The resulting friction was behind the U.S. refusal to appear on Israel's behalf when Palestinians brought the fence to the International Court of Justice in The Hague in February.

Sharon has promised a finalized withdrawal plan in time for an April 14 summit with President Bush. Sharon's bureau chief, Dov Weisglass, is in Washington this week for another round of talks with U.S. officials, discussions that have been shuttling back and forth between Washington and Jerusalem since early February.

It's an open question whether Sharon will meet the deadline. U.S. officials and others have expressed frustration with the vagueness of the proposals so far.

"What are the parameters?" David Satterfield, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, told the Israel Policy Forum recently. "Not just for Gaza, but for the West Bank, for the separation barrier. What's out there?"

**'Is Sharon once again being the great tactician and the terrible strategist?'**

**David Mack**

Middle East Institute

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# Kerry's skeleton in the closet may be a Golem

By DINA KRAFT

PRAGUE (JTA) — When you run for president, you have to be prepared for opponents finding skeletons in your closet.

But in the case of Sen. John Kerry, the senator's past may reveal not so much a skeleton but a Golem, the legendary Jewish man of clay.

A respected Czech historian is claiming that the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee may be a descendant of the great Rabbi Judah Loew (1520-1609), a famous Kabbalist, philosopher and talmudist known as the Maharal of Prague.

Loew, who is buried in Prague's old Jewish cemetery, is said to have created the Golem to protect Prague's Jewish community from outside threats. The Golem, as legend has it, was a faithful servant until Loew was forced to drain the creature of its life force after it developed an ego and disobeyed its creator.

Kerry learned recently that his paternal grandfather was a German Jew born in 1873 in the north Moravian town of Horni Benesov. Further research established that the Massachusetts senator's oldest known Czech Jewish ancestor is Bernhard Loew, born in 1771 in the south Moravian town of Boskovice.

But local historian Jaroslav Bransky has dug deeper into Bernhard Loew's past — and says there is strong evidence to indicate that Kerry is related to Judah Loew's brother, Sinai.

"Everything is showing that Kerry's

family is descended from Sinai," said Bransky, who has written several books on the once thriving Jewish community in Boskovice.

Bransky believes that the family tree leads from Sinai, one of three older brothers of Rabbi Loew, to Josefina Loew, one of Kerry's great-grandmothers.

Little is known about Sinai. History books have focused on his more famous brother who, even centuries after his death, draws large crowds to Prague's Jewish Quarter.

Bransky reached his conclusion by using local archival material and epitaphs from gravestones at Boskovice's Jewish cemetery, one of the largest in the country. But he says his search was hampered by the destruction of town records in an early-19th-century fire.

"I can't precisely prove everything because there are some gaps in the chain," Bransky said. "But I plan to continue on this research."

Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, welcomed Bransky's research but urged caution.

"Loew's family history is very complicated and at the moment we don't have much more than speculation."

Bransky says he is more interested in

the Loew family than the Kerry connection.

"I don't have any Jewish roots myself, but I have been interested in the topic of Jews in Boskovice since the 1960s because my father and I were both born in the Jewish Quarter of the town and I spent my childhood surrounded by Jewish friends."

Town records show that Jews were

living in Boskovice as early as the mid-15th century. It was one of the biggest Jewish communities in Moravia in the 19th-century, but the community was later torn apart by the Holocaust. Only 14 of 458 Boskovice Jews deported to concentration camps survived the war.

Bransky, 75, says he will never forget those who died in the Holocaust. "I was very sorry when the Jewish population was removed in transports during the war. Afterward the town felt like a desert," Bransky added.

Kraus said he would be delighted if evidence does prove Kerry's link to Rabbi Loew.

"Mr. Kerry would be welcome to come to Prague, whether or not he wins the election in the United States. We would be very happy, as we are in other cases, to help him find out more about his family," Kraus said. ■

'At the moment we don't have much more than speculation.'

Tomas Kraus

Czech Federation of Jewish Communities

## Sudden upsurge of anti-Semitic acts in Toronto

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — The Jewish community here is trying to rally after a rash of anti-Semitic incidents in which unknown perpetrators broke seven stained-glass windows at a synagogue and spray-painted swastikas and anti-Semitic messages at various locations along a main city thoroughfare.

United Jewish Appeals signs in the city also were defaced and swastikas were painted on a clothing donation box. The damage was discovered Saturday morning.

In a separate weekend incident, 22 cemetery tombstones were toppled in the nearby Bathurst-Lawn Jewish Cemetery.

"We had a weekend of hate in Toronto," said Bernie Farber, executive director of the Ontario region of Canadian Jewish Congress, after inspecting the damage at the cemetery with police on Sunday morning.

Jews and supporters gathered at one of the vandalized homes

Sunday morning to remove swastikas and hate messages. A community rally was scheduled for Wednesday evening.

"We're not intimidated but we're certainly angry," Farber said. "The community is on edge. We've faced adversities for countless generations. We're a strong people. We'll deal with this and we'll do what we have to do to protect our community."

The incidents took place only days after vandals spray-painted swastikas and hateful messages in a Jewish neighborhood in the Toronto suburb of Thornhill.

Canadian officials were quick to express their outrage.

"As prime minister, I condemn them," Paul Martin wrote in a letter to the Canadian Jewish Congress. "As a Canadian, as a human being, I condemn them."

Law enforcement officials pledged to investigate the attacks.

In response to the first spate of vandalism, Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino ordered patrolmen to pay special attention to Jewish establishments and organizations. ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Senators propose security funding

Several U.S. senators want to create a fund to help non-profits stay secure from terrorist attacks.

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) said Jewish institutions would benefit from the "high-risk non-profit security enhancement act of 2004," which is to be introduced soon by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.).

The \$100 million fund would address "the concern that there is extra vulnerability attached to being a Jewish institution in this war on terror," Clinton said Tuesday at a United Jewish Communities young leadership gathering.

The UJC delegates were to lobby Tuesday on Capitol Hill for just such funds.

### Security stepped up in N.Y.

Security was stepped up at synagogues and Jewish neighborhoods in New York City.

The move is being taken amid fears of retaliatory strikes on Jewish targets after Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin on Monday.

New York City's police chief, Raymond Kelly, said there were no specific threats behind the stepped-up efforts. But an Islamic Web site published a statement from an Al-Qaida-linked Web site vowing revenge on the United States and its allies over Yassin's assassination. Hamas members in Gaza also spoke of taking revenge on targets outside Israel after Yassin's killing.

### Groups banned for a week

A Toronto university rescinded permission for demonstrations by Jewish and Palestinian student groups after recent clashes.

Students from Hillel and the Young Zionist Partnership had obtained a permit for an outdoor vigil at York University last week for victims of suicide bombings.

Many became incensed when pro-Palestinian activists set up an unauthorized, street-theater-style demonstration nearby with mock Israeli checkpoints and soldiers.

When members of the Palestinian group went inside a campus building, many Jewish students followed and a brief melee erupted involving hundreds of students.

In response, university administrators forbade the groups from sponsoring rallies or lectures on campus for a week.

"We do view the suspension as an overreaction," said Zac Kaye, executive director of Hillel of Greater Toronto. "Our hope is that it will be lifted and that Hillel will be able to resume its activities as before."

## MIDDLE EAST

### Israeli troops in Gaza

Israeli troops entered the northern Gaza Strip late Monday night.

The move came after rockets were fired at Israeli towns in the Negev on Monday following the assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

### Yassin first on hit list?

Israel said Sheik Ahmed Yassin was only the first terrorist leader on its hit list.

"Anyone in the Gaza Strip or West Bank, or anywhere else, leading a terrorist group knows that as of yesterday there is no immunity," Internal Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi told reporters Tuesday.

He was referring to Monday's assassination of the Hamas founder in Gaza.

Hanegbi did not name names, but he said terrorists who appear on television were included on the hit list — an apparent reference to senior Hamas spokesman Abdel Aziz Rantissi, who is expected to succeed Yassin as Hamas' top man.

### Israeli Arabs protest Yassin murder

An estimated 2,500 Israeli Arabs protested Israel's assassination of Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

Some of the protesters at Tuesday's rally in Nazareth held Palestinian flags and pro-Islamic flags. Some called for Hamas' military wing to avenge Monday's death of the Hamas founder.

Dozens of left-wing Israelis protesting the assassination were evicted from the entrance to Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

### Fear and loathing in Israel

Most Israelis are glad Sheik Ahmed Yassin is dead but believe his assassination will spark a wave of Palestinian terrorism.

A poll by Israel's daily Ma'ariv found that 61 percent of Israelis supported Monday's assassination, and 55 percent are bracing for fiercer campaigns of suicide bombings and shooting attacks.

Twenty-one percent of Israelis were opposed to the assassination, while 45 percent think terrorism will remain unchanged or will decline, Ma'ariv reported Tuesday.

Meanwhile, security was increased for Israeli lawmakers following threats against public officials in the wake of the Yassin killing.

### Outpost petition lost

Israeli settlers lost their challenge against a government decision to remove unauthorized West Bank settlement outposts.

The High Court of Justice said Tuesday it had rejected a petition on behalf of Havat Maon and Tal Binyamin, which were marked for evacuation by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in January.

A decision is still pending on four more outposts slated for removal.

The Defense Ministry declined to say when it might move against Havat Maon and Tal Binyamin in accordance with the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan, which calls for Israel to remove all unauthorized outposts erected since March 2001.

## WORLD

### French synagogue damaged

A synagogue in southern France was badly damaged by a gasoline bomb.

Congregants discovered the attack when they arrived for prayers early Tuesday morning at the main synagogue in Toulon, Yves Haddad, president of the local Jewish community, told JTA.

Haddad said he didn't know whether the attack was perpetrated by Muslims, possibly enraged by Israel's killing of Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin, or by far-right French extremists.

In the 1990s, Toulon, a city of about 150,000 people, elected an extremist mayor from the right-wing National Front Party.

### Animated Haggadah

An Israeli film company's animated Haggadah is now available online. Web surfers can download the entire Haggadah for free and find Passover recipes, games and music on Scopus Films' "Animated Haggadah" Web site.

The Passover video in clay animation is one of several multimedia products available from the Jerusalem-based company, which also has developed CD-ROMS and DVDS for Shabbat and major Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah and Purim.

The Haggadah is online at [www.scopusfilms.com/haggadah](http://www.scopusfilms.com/haggadah).