



IN THE NEWS

Israelis killed in bombing ID'd

The two Israelis murdered in Wednesday's suicide bombing in Jerusalem were identified. Israeli border policemen Mamoya Tahio and Menashe Komemi were killed in the blast near a bus stop in the French Hill neighborhood.

The Al-Aksa Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack, which also injured at least 15 people.

A teenaged woman, Zayneb Abu Salem, from a refugee camp in the West Bank city of Nablus, was identified as the bomber.

Germany agrees to take up Jewish cause

Germany agreed to sponsor a U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning anti-Semitism.

German officials told Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom it would agree to the move, Shalom told reporters Tuesday.

The resolution is a key objective for Jewish officials in the current U.N. General Assembly.

Shalom also told reporters that he met Iraq's prime minister Ayad Allawi, marking the first diplomatic exchange between Iraq and Israel since Iraq's new government took over.

"I told him I hope peace will come in the near future" to the region, and Allawi and members of his delegation smiled in response, Shalom said.

Israeli strike comes to an end

Israel's major labor federation called off a general strike that had paralyzed the country.

The Histadrut labor federation ordered 400,000 public-sector employees back to their jobs Wednesday, on the orders of the national Labor Court.

The Histadrut launched the strike Tuesday to protest the non-payment of municipal salaries.

Labor Court president Steve Adler also ordered the government to pay the salaries of 96 percent of affected municipal employees.

WORLD REPORT

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Bronfman to stay, others go as rift at WJC leads to action

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's been a stormy week at the World Jewish Congress.

Two senior officials have left — apparently not of their own accord — the president who intended to resign changed his mind, and the group's next worldwide plenum was moved up to this fall from 2006.

What is happening at the WJC?

Amid questions about financial irregularities and an apparent power struggle at the helm of the organization, the group's steering committee announced Monday that the WJC's senior vice president, Isi Leibler, was asked to cease all activity on behalf of the organization.

The group's longtime president, Edgar Bronfman, who was expected to step down next year after two and a half decades at the helm, also announced that he was aborting his resignation plans and would run for another five-year term.

The moves come just days after an internal squabble at the WJC became public and turned ugly, involving charges of corruption, financial irregularities, stolen computer records and blackmail.

Leibler, who also was stripped Monday of his membership on the WJC steering committee, said the moves are an attempt to silence whistle-blowers calling for fiscal transparency and a comprehensive, independent audit at the organization.

"What happened yesterday was akin to a politburo," Leibler told JTA the day after the committee's meeting. "The experience of undergoing a kangaroo court was somewhat unique."

Israel Singer, chairman of the WJC's governing board, denied that Monday's meeting with regional representatives of the WJC was a politburo.

"A politburo is a bunch of cronies. These were not cronies. These are democratically elected people that came with proxies to throw him out," Singer said, referring to Leibler.

The shakeup at the WJC extends beyond Leibler. The group's executive vice president, Elan Steinberg, also is leaving his post.

While both he and other WJC officials were careful not to characterize his departure as a dismissal, the move comes after WJC officials came to believe that Steinberg was allied with Leibler in making claims about activities at the organization.

Monday's emergency meeting of the steering committee came in the wake of charges that top officials at the organization may have tried to hide \$1.2 million in a Swiss bank account, that the Jewish Agency for Israel made an unusual \$1.5 million payment to the congress and that Leibler was orchestrating a campaign of disinformation in an attempt to seize power at the WJC.

Bronfman also said he would move up the group's next worldwide plenary meeting to this fall, rather than waiting until late 2005 or early 2006, as originally planned.

Bronfman said he was making the changes "given the priority of moving past the turbulence of the last year and the need to take a more productive posture towards restructuring efforts I started last year," according to a WJC statement. He declined to comment for this article.

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ *WJC squabble leads to departures*

Continued from page 1

This is not the first time Leibler and Bronfman have sparred publicly. A year ago, their political differences spilled into the public after Leibler wrote a newspaper column demanding that Bronfman apologize or resign for urging President Bush to pressure Israel and the Palestinians to follow the “road map” peace plan.

But both he and Bronfman’s deputies insist that this time, the conflict is not about politics.

“It did start that way,” said Singer. “Bronfman differs with Leibler in substance, but this has nothing to do with substance — it has to do with scurrilous behavior. Leibler used McCarthyite tactics in a situation where he had no substance.”

At the crux of the brouhaha at the WJC are two alternative narratives that paint very different pictures of the current conflict.

According to Leibler’s narrative, he and a few others connected to the WJC became aware in July of possible financial irregularities at the organization — including a previously unknown \$1.2 million bank account in Switzerland that Singer claimed was for his pension — and pushed internally for an overhaul of the organization and its finances.

According to this account, Singer and Bronfman tried to weaken Leibler’s ability to effect change by dismantling the three-person operations committee on which Leibler and Steinberg wielded

significant power and replacing it in August with a nine-person steering committee that included Leibler but not Steinberg.

When Leibler continued to press for fiscal transparency — which Leibler said the WJC’s 400,000 North American donors rightly deserved — Singer, aware that Leibler’s questions were raising eyebrows, went to the media pre-emptively in an attempt to discredit Leibler, refute his claims and portray him as disgruntled and power hungry, according to Leibler’s narrative.

E-mails that Leibler said had been taken illicitly from his computer, which appeared to back up Singer’s claims, then were circulated to the media.

A very different narrative is being promoted by Singer, Pinchas Shapiro — the deputy director of the congress in New York — and Stephen Herbits, Bronfman’s longtime associate, whom Bronfman appointed to be transition manager at the WJC.

They say Leibler knows there is nothing nefarious happening at the WJC and that his raising of questions about irregularities needlessly sullies the otherwise good name of a 68-year-old organization that has been at the forefront of the worldwide fight against anti-Semitism, achieved great successes in negotiations with European governments over Holocaust restitution, and represents Jews and Jewish interests around the world.

According to their account, Leibler either knew or easily could have found out about the \$1.2 million account, which has been set aside for pension payments — including future payments to Singer, who receives an annual \$226,000 pension from the WJC.

The three-person operations committee was replaced in August with the nine-person steering committee to give greater representation to regional WJC chairmen around the world, according to this account.

And Singer went to the media to rebut Leibler’s allegations only after Leibler already had leaked to the media details of his 12-page memorandum outlining his charges.

For the time being, the truth of all these claims and counterclaims remains unclear.

There are enough questions, says Leibler, to “justify a fully independent, comprehensive audit.”

“The real issue, to my mind, is corporate governance,” he said. “Full fiscal transparency and accountability — that’s what this is all about.”

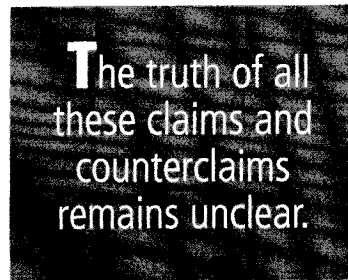
WJC officials say that the organization undergoes an independent audit each year and there is full transparency.

The appointment of Herbits, whom Bronfman described in an Aug. 30 memo to the WJC leadership as his “right hand man at Seagram,” would “rebut any and all attacks on the World Jewish Congress” and “manage a full operational and financial

audit,” according to that memo.

Herbits told JTA he has reviewed the financial statements of the WJC’s auditors and so far concluded that there is no malfeasance at the WJC by anyone “other than those people making this information public,” referring to Leibler.

He said of those auditors, “If I feel there is a need — not a legal need, but a need to quiet this debate — I will ask them to expand on those issues that are being discussed.”



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Israeli innovator honored

An Israeli was named among the world’s 100 top innovators. Yaakov Benenson was commended by Technology Review’s innovation round-up this month for his research on miniaturizing medical techniques.

The 28-year-old doctoral student at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot was the first Israeli to make the annual list of top innovators put out by the review, a publication of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Benenson’s machines “represent a quantum leap not only in medicine but also in DNA computing,” said George Church, director of the Center for Computational Genetics at Harvard Medical School.

Israel looks to 'day after' Gaza in meetings

By RON KAMPEAS

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — At home, Israel's government may be preoccupied with the road to a Gaza Strip pullout, but abroad, its emphasis is on the road beyond.

Israeli diplomats, dreading the vacuum the pullout set for mid-2005 might create, have scrambled in recent weeks for U.S., European and Arab help in propping up an Israel-free Gaza Strip.

"Day-after" scenarios are the focus of a flurry of meetings between Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and his counterparts attending this week's opening of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

Shalom was especially eager to meet with foreign ministers from Arab nations, key to Israeli plans to nudge the Palestinians toward replacing Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat by the time Israel leaves.

"While Arafat is still in power, there is no glimmer of hope there will be moderate Palestinians that will be able to talk to us," Shalom told Jewish leaders convened Monday by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The foreign minister met with counterparts from Tunisia, Oman, Qatar, Morocco and Mauritania and spoke with Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers early this week at an event honoring Seeds of Peace, a group promoting dialogue between Israeli and Arab youths.

He even had a quick conversation in passing with Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Al-lawi, in which each man wished for a more peaceful Middle East.

The meetings appeared to pay off: Qatari leader Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani was predictably tough on Israel in his U.N. speech Tuesday, blaming the Jewish state for the dire economic straits of the Palestinians.

However, Hamad did not mention Arafat at all, nor did he issue the once-standard call for the Palestinian leader's release from virtual house arrest.

Qatar is home to the most influential Arab satellite TV channel, Al-Jazeera. Although the sheik does not directly influence its coverage, the omission was nonetheless telling. Should Israel persuade Arab opinion makers to diminish Arafat's status as a victim, that could undermine his standing in Palestinian elections scheduled for before the withdrawal.

The Arab state most key to Israel's hopes of a smooth Gaza transition is Egypt, which is committed to retraining and reorganizing Palestinian security forces before the Israeli evacuation.

Egyptian officials have strong-armed Arafat into agreeing to consolidate a myriad of security services into just three bodies, which is likely to hamper Arafat's longstanding strategy of maintaining power by playing one armed Palestinian faction against the other.

Egypt also has invited the first cadre of Palestinian police officers — 45 of them — for training in Egypt.

In addition, talks in Cairo appear to be heading toward an agreement among Palestinian factions to keep the peace once Israel leaves Gaza. Israel discourages the inclusion of terrorist groups in "cease-fire" agreements, but privately,

Israeli officials concede the necessity of getting all factions on board.

In response to Egypt's efforts, Israel has tamped down its criticism of Egypt for failing to stop arms smuggling on the Egypt-Gaza border.

"Egypt has changed its attitude during the last year," said Shalom, not once one of the leading government skeptics of Egyptian willingness to cooperate with Israel.

The new Egyptian-Israeli closeness is encouraging for Israel, but there are still gaps.

Shalom touted new commerce zones in Egypt for Palestinian laborers to replace the ones on the Israeli-Gaza border shut down because of the security threat they posed. But Egyptian officials are not enthusiastic about masses of Palestinians crossing their border each day.

Additionally, Egypt is making clear to Israel its position that the Gaza withdrawal should be a first step toward Palestinian statehood, not an end in itself. Commitment to Palestinian statehood is unlikely in the current volatile political environment in Israel. In fact, in the wake of continued suicide attacks like the one in Jerusalem on Wednesday that killed two policemen, it is about as low as it can be on the national agenda.

Israel is not focused only on Arab support for the withdrawal. European assis-

tance is also seen as crucial to helping the Palestinians get on their feet.

Shalom was also meeting this week with Javier Solana, the European Union's secretary-general. Israel wants the Europeans to contribute to Palestinian infrastructure needs once it withdraws from Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

Shalom was expected to swallow years of resentment at the United Nations' perceived pro-Arab slant on Thursday when he was expected to deliver a speech calling for greater U.N.-Israel cooperation.

Shalom told the group of Jewish leaders that his government was forging ahead with the "day-after" plans because withdrawal is increasingly seen as inevitable, despite the settlement movement's surprisingly strong campaign against it.

On Tuesday, Shalom handed U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell a timetable for the withdrawal, which Shalom says will happen no later than March.

"The prime minister is determined about it," he told reporters after the meeting.

More significant is pressure from the Bush administration, which is still eager to get Arab nations on board in its efforts to tamp down violence in U.S.-occupied Iraq.

U.S. officials have made it clear to Israel that there is a price to be paid for U.S. support on issues the Jewish state considers critical — the building of the West Bank security barrier and keeping Arafat isolated.

President Bush addressed the Israeli-Palestinian issue in his speech to the United Nations on Tuesday. He called on other nations to join the United States in isolating Arafat. "World leaders should withdraw all favor and support from any Palestinian ruler who fails his people and betrays their cause," Bush said.

But he also said: "Israel should impose a settlement freeze, dismantle unauthorized outposts, end the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people, and avoid any actions that prejudice final negotiations."

Bush's unequivocal call for a settlement freeze appeared to squelch speculation that the United States was ready to live with the recent renewed building within some settlements.

(JTA staff writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Maryland gives funds to Jewish schools

Maryland's governor will give \$100,000 to help secure Jewish schools in the state.

Maryland becomes the first state to authorize federal homeland security dollars for the protection of Jewish sites after the Department of Homeland Security determined in July that high-risk non-profit institutions were eligible for the money.

Gov. Robert Ehrlich, a Republican, announced the funding Tuesday at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Md.

"Unfortunately, this is a function of the era we live in," Ehrlich told *The Washington Post*. Jewish organizations are working to get a separate pool of money in the federal Homeland Security appropriations for the protection of high-risk nonprofits.

The measure has been added to legislation, and awaits final passage.

Cam Kerry stumps for votes

The brother of Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) stumped for Jewish votes in New York City.

Cameron Kerry, himself a convert to Judaism, spent Wednesday morning meeting a host of New York Jewish communal officials.

He later met with Jewish journalists and then went to Brooklyn, where he visited a garage of Hatzolah, the Jewish volunteer ambulance service, and a food pantry run by the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty.

Ros-Lehtinen meets Israelis, Jordanians

A U.S. lawmaker met with Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), the chairwoman of the House of Representatives' Middle East subcommittee, said Wednesday's meeting focused on the Middle East peace process, Israel's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, Iran's nuclear program, the situation in Iraq, prospects for political and economic reform in the region and U.S. assistance programs.

Presbyterian Israel issue hits Congress

Some U.S. lawmakers are concerned with plans by the Presbyterian Church to divest from Israel.

A letter sent from 14 congressional representatives to the leader of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church last week suggests the church misunderstands the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is contradicting its commitment to the secure existence of the Jewish state.

"We disagree with your characterization of the conflict as 'rooted in Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories,'" the letter says.

"We believe the conflict is primarily rooted in the Palestinian leadership's refusal to accept Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state."

The letter called plans to divest from Israel because of concerns about its West Bank security barrier and planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip "counterproductive, and morally bankrupt."

Would Kramer wear a kippah?

The highlights of a Yom Kippur service will be aired on a U.S. cable channel.

Actor Jason Alexander, of "Seinfeld" fame, will read from the Torah as part of the 30-minute service, slated to air Saturday morning on the PAX channel.

The service is sponsored by Temple Shalom of the Arts in Los Angeles and the United Jewish Communities.

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon again threatens Arafat

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon again hinted that Yasser Arafat could meet a fate similar to Hamas chiefs assassinated by Israel.

"We took action against the leaders of Hamas in a manner we considered right, and at the right time for us," Sharon told *Israel Radio* on Wednesday, referring to Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi, both slain in air strikes earlier this year. "When the issue of dealing with Arafat comes up, we will act again in this manner."

Since taking office in 2001, Sharon has shunned the Palestinian Authority president for his role in Palestinian violence. The prime minister also has suggested Arafat could be exiled or tried in Israel as a terrorist.

"Everyone will get what he deserves," Sharon said.

Jihad in Jerusalem?

Ten young Arabs from Jerusalem are suspected of carrying out arson attacks on behalf of a Palestinian terrorist group.

The suspects, aged 18 to 21, were arrested in recent weeks for a series of Molotov cocktail attacks against Jewish-owned buildings in the capital as well as throwing stones at cars, the Shin Bet announced Wednesday.

They are believed to belong to the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and to have planned to undergo military training with West Bank terrorist groups.

Shin Bet chief lauded

The *Jerusalem Post* named Avi Dichter its "Man of the Year" for the Jewish year 5764.

Dichter, Israel's Shin Bet chief, "epitomized the insistence that with resolve and imagination, terror can be put on the defensive," the paper said in making its choice.

The paper noted Dichter's role in reducing the number of Israeli fatalities from 456 in 2002 to 213 in 2003, and halving the number again in the first eight months of 2003 to 80.

WORLD

Brazil enters Jewish film in Oscars

A movie about the life story of a Jewish Communist was chosen to be Brazil's foreign film entry for the 2005 Oscars.

On Tuesday, the Brazilian Ministry of Culture chose "Olga" out of a list of 10 movies to be the country's representative in the contest.

The film tells the story of Olga Benario, a German-born Jewish Communist who goes to Brazil in order to lead a revolution with Brazilian activist Luis Carlos Prestes. The two fall in love. Seven months pregnant, Benario is deported to Germany where she gives birth.

In 1942, she is killed in a Nazi gas chamber. "Olga" has been the most-watched Brazilian movie in 2004.

Yom Kippur comes to Italian town

Yom Kippur services are being held this year in the Italian town of Trani for the first time in half a millennium.

Trani, in southern Italy, had a thriving Jewish community in medieval times until Jews were expelled from Puglia 500 years ago.

A small Jewish community was reorganized this year through the joint efforts of the culture and education department of the Italian Union of Jewish Communities and Chabad.

One of Rome's seven congregations has loaned a rabbi and cantor to officiate at Yom Kippur services, and Trani's mayor has made the former Colona Monastery available as a house of worship until the medieval Scolanova Synagogue, long used as a church, is restored.