

IN THE NEWS

Man stabs seven at Moscow synagogue

A man stabbed seven people at a Moscow synagogue.

The incident took place just before Wednesday's evening service, when the Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue in downtown Moscow was full of worshippers.

One man was in critical condition and at least four others are in serious condition, medical officials said Wednesday night.

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Israel appeals to Russia over Iran

Israel urged Russia to help rein in Iran's nuclear program.

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office said he discussed the subject by telephone Wednesday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"Israel is worried by the developments in the Iranian arena and comments its leadership made on Israel. The issue should be transferred, as soon as possible, to the U.N. Security Council so it can take the necessary steps to prevent the nuclearization of Iran," Olmert was quoted as saying.

Russia, which has helped build the main Iranian nuclear reactor, has argued for a less stringent stance on the Islamic Republic.

Israel shuns Pat Robertson

Israel said U.S. evangelical leader Pat Robertson would not be allowed to take part in the planning of a new Christian tourist site.

A spokesman for Tourism Minister Abraham Hirschson said Wednesday that Robertson, who recently suggested that Ariel Sharon's stroke was divine punishment for last summer's Gaza withdrawal, would not be allowed to take part in a \$48 million Christian Heritage Center on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The spokesman, Jonathan Pulik, said Israel would include other Christian groups in the 125-acre project, which is expected to be complete by the end of the decade.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

In Israel, Jewish legislators network, visit Sharon's hospital

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Joseph Bismouth is the only Jewish lawmaker in Tunisia — and, as he likes to point out, the only Jewish lawmaker anywhere in the Arab world.

A member of Tunisia's newly formed Senate, Bismouth was among Jewish lawmakers from 30 nations — from Costa Rica and Gibraltar to the United States and Australia — who gathered in Jerusalem for a three-day conference that ended Tuesday.

"We are all from different countries, different civilizations and different cultures," Bismouth said. "Each brings something else to the other."

The International Council of Jewish Parliamentarians was formed in 2002 as a platform for Jewish lawmakers to cooperate on issues of common concern such as battling anti-Semitism, forging strong interfaith relationships and working toward social reform.

Being in Israel while Prime Minister Ariel Sharon battled for his life after his Jan. 4 stroke gave the parliamentarians an unusual window into Israeli society.

"It is a reaffirmation of democracy in Israel that when something this traumatic happens, people are sad but not disorganized," said U.S. Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

"There is a terrific sense of unity here," said Louise Ellman, a Labor legislator from the United Kingdom.

The lawmakers went to Hadassah-University Medical Center at Ein Kerem, where Sharon is being treated, to meet with hospital director Dr. Shlomo Mor-Yosef, who gave them an overview of the prime minister's condition.

Sharon was among those scheduled to speak to the gathering. His deputy, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, met with the lawmakers at his offices Tuesday after canceling a planned speech to them earlier that day.

The parliamentarians also heard from former prime ministers Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as Labor Party head Amir Peretz.

Bobby Brown, Israel director of the World Jewish Congress, which organized the event, said the gathering was not just a place to network but to see what Jewish lawmakers could do to further humanitarian and Jewish issues.

"The problems facing the Jewish people today are more and more global," said Brown, citing the Iranian nuclear threat as an example. "It's time to act together."

He compared the group to the Black or Hispanic caucuses in the U.S. Congress — bodies of individuals from similar backgrounds who work together for common causes.

Yevda Abramov traveled to Israel from Azerbaijan to take part in the conference. Abramov is the only Jewish member of Azerbaijan's parliament, representing a northern district that borders Russia.

The silver-haired Abramov has been busy lately speaking out against recent anti-Israel comments by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"I am trying to be a bridge between Azerbaijan and Israel," Abramov said.

Three of Abramov's four children live in Israel. Recently he has been trying to facilitate agricultural business contacts between

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■ *Lawmakers from around the world shmooze and visit Sharon's hospital*

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the two countries.

Ellman said that being briefed on Israel's security situation, including growing unrest in Gaza and the new types of explosives and weapons reportedly being made there, together with information about the Iranian nuclear threat, will help her work as a lawmaker.

"I will be particularly vigilant on all of these," said Ellman, who is vice chairman of the British Parliament's commission against anti-Semitism. She said there were assertive voices on both sides of the British Parliament that were

quick to "condemn Israel without realizing the shortcomings of the Palestinians."

Ellman, one of four British legislators attending the conference, said there were 20 Jewish members of Parliament in the United Kingdom with a range of attitudes toward Israel.

She said the conference also shed light on different ways anti-Semitism is manifesting itself around the world, including through the Internet and satellite television.

"I will go back with new information to do even more," she said.

Canadian Senator Jerry Grafstein, who has played a leading role in pushing international resolutions against anti-Semitism, said the conference was a good place to trade information about "issues that affect all of us as Jews and parliamentarians."

For Aida Fishman, a daughter of Holocaust survivors from Poland who became a member of Costa Rica's Parliament, seeing Jewish lawmakers from around the globe was a revelation.

"One feels less alone," she said. "There is a feeling of how close we are and how much we can do together." ■

Stabbing at Moscow synagogue leaves seven injured

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Israeli Embassy is pressing Russia's Foreign Ministry to install more security at Jewish institutions in the country after a man stabbed seven people at a Moscow synagogue Wednesday night.

"Events in Moscow have aroused grave concerns," embassy press secretary Mikhail Brodsky said.

The incident took place just before Wednesday's evening service, when the Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue in downtown Moscow was full of worshippers.

The man, identified by police as Alexander Koptsev, 20, struck out at random before being pushed to the ground

by Yitzhak Kogan, the shul's rabbi, and Kogan's son.

The floor of the synagogue was covered with blood stains.

The attacker, with self-inflicted injuries, was checked into the same Moscow hospital as most of his victims. Police said the man will be arrested once his condition allows it.

One man was in critical condition and at least four others are in serious condition, medical officials said Wednesday night. All seven victims — including a senior citizen — remain under hospital care.

Among those wounded were Russians, several Israelis, an American — Kogan's son-in-law, Michael Mishulin — and a rabbinical student from Tajikistan.

Businessman Lev Levayev is sending a private plane to Moscow with Israeli doctors, scheduled to arrive Wednesday night. They are expected to take the seriously injured to Israel on Thursday morning.

Witnesses said the attacker shouted, "I came to kill you," and looked like a skinhead, but an unnamed source with the Moscow police told news agencies that the attacker is not a known member of any known neo-Nazi group.

Among the witnesses was Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities. "It's petrifying," he said.

Berkowitz's 2-year-old son, Menachem-Mendel, attends kindergarten at the Bolshaya Bronnaya shul. On Wednesday night, Berkowitz came to pick up his son and to pray.

"I don't know whether I will send Menachem-Mendel to school tomorrow," he said.

The shul is one of the oldest in Moscow and serves as the base of the Agudas Chasidei Chabad in Russia, a Lubavitch organization.

Major Russian news channels opened their evening broadcasts with live reports on the incident, an unusual amount of attention for an anti-Semitic attack in the region.

North American Jewish groups expressed outrage over the incident. NCSJ, a group that monitors Jewish life in the region, "condemns the attack and calls for greater vigilance of religious sites," Mark Levin, the group's executive director, said in a statement.

Leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Muslim community condemned the attack and expressed their sympathies toward the Jewish community. ■

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JTA WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more 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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Palestinians in limbo over Sharon's condition

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Even the Palestinian Kassam rocket launchers took time out when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was hospitalized: Either they were preparing for the Muslim holiday of Id al-Adha, or they were saying, let's wait and see.

The Kassam rockets were back in action this week. They didn't hit anyone, but they did indicate that Sharon's absence from the decision-making process has not changed the patterns of conflict — at least not until Jan. 25 elections for the Palestinian legislature.

In any case, Palestinian society appears too consumed by its own internal problems to worry too much about Sharon's condition, and what will come next.

Most Arab reaction to the debilitating stroke Sharon suffered Jan. 4 has referred to his bloody past, underplaying his historic withdrawal of Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip last summer.

Even the Web page of Al-Jazeera — which, like all major Arab television networks, has been broadcasting live reports from the Jerusalem hospital where Sharon is hospitalized — contained an article saying Sharon “the butcher, sometimes the Butcher of Beirut, sometimes the Butcher of Palestine, is rarely mentioned without listing the dozens of crimes he committed and the thousands of Arabs he killed.”

Palestinians remember Sharon foremost for the 1953 anti-terror reprisal he led in the West Bank village of Kibya in which 69 Palestinians, including many civilians, were killed; for having orchestrated the 1982 Lebanon War to destroy the PLO's terror enclave in southern Lebanon; for having failed to prevent the Christian massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut; and for his role as the architect of the Israeli settlement movement in the territories.

One of the few public voices to criticize Sharon's demonization was Knesset Member Abdulmalik Dehamshe of the Islamic-oriented United Arab List.

“I have opposed Sharon for many years, and I have said harsh things to him, “Dehamshe told Ha'aretz, “but who would have thought that this man would withdraw from Gaza?”

Another local voice of sympathy was

that of Talal al-Krinawi, mayor of the Bedouin town of Rahat, which is located close to Sharon's Sycamore Farm in the Negev.

“If you had told me to vote Sharon before 2001, I would have preferred to amputate my arm,” Krinawi told Yediot Achronot's Ynet Web site.

Ahead of the March 28 elections, however, “I would have proudly urged everyone to vote for him in the elections,” he said. “I and many other Arabs love him very much. We had our hopes pinned that he would lead us to peace.”

Indeed, some Israeli Arabs interviewed in the Israeli press shortly after Sharon's stroke said that despite the public Arab criticism of Sharon, many Israeli Arabs privately considered Sharon “a real man,” whose word could be trusted.

The conspicuous element in Arab reaction over the past few days has been the absence of public rejoicing over Sharon's ailment, unlike after Sharon's first stroke in December.

Official Palestinian Authority reactions were restrained, reflecting puzzlement.

The P.A.'s deputy prime minister, Nabil Sha'ath, said it was too early to tell whether Israelis “would return to the right.”

“We are interested in the peace process,” said Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei, but Sharon's ailment “will affect not only Israel but the entire region.”

The Arab confusion is genuine. Despite frequent criticism of Sharon, many Arabs believe he has two advantages: He broke the taboo over evacuating settlements, and he is a known entity.

Ehud Olmert, Israel's acting prime minister, is still an enigma in a national leadership role, despite his comments in favor of further West Bank withdrawals.

Will Sharon's Kadima Party win the elections if it is led by Olmert? Will it be strong enough to push through withdrawals from the West Bank?

“There is widespread concern among Palestinians that with this sudden absence of Sharon from political life, newly emerging Israeli leaders will simply rush to compete with each other over who can be tougher with the Palestinians, to boost

their popularity ahead of the upcoming Israeli elections in March,” Hisham Ahmed, a political science professor at Bir-Zeit University near Ramallah, wrote on the joint Palestinian-Israeli Web page Bitterlemons.

With Sharon “it was bad, and with other” Israeli prime ministers “it will be bad,” said Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, a human rights activist running for the Palestinian Legislative Council. “Unless we see a government of Israel that ends the occupation, we won't see change.”

Israeli security experts warned this week that the various Palestinian terrorist groups might try to provoke Israel to see how Olmert reacts.

Former Mossad head Ephraim Halevy said an interview that Olmert would react “strongly” to any attack in order to stabilize his image in the Arab world.

On the other hand, now that the issue of voting in eastern Jerusalem seems to have been resolved — Mofaz declared Tuesday that Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem would be allowed to vote, just as they had in past Palestinian elections — some analysts believed that none of the major political powers in the Palestinian territories would risk an escalation.

Moreover, the Palestinians are so preoccupied with their own internal disarray that they have little energy to devote to the challenge of a new Israeli leadership.

Having ignored advice not to further expand its huge employment rolls, the Palestinian Authority now is nearly bankrupt, and it may not be able to pay salaries next month. It faces a huge budget deficit and has done little to tame rival militias fighting each other in the streets of the Gaza Strip.

Some in the Palestinian Authority advocated postponing elections until the situation in Israel stabilized and internal Palestinian anarchy cooled down. But jailed Fatah movement leader Marwan Barghouti warned against using Sharon's health as a pretext to postpone the Palestinian election.

P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas said that he also saw no reason why Sharon's demise should lead to a postponement of the election.

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

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NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Rice: Let Jerusalem Arabs vote

Condoleezza Rice welcomed Israel's decision to allow Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem to vote.

"Holding free and fair Palestinian Legislative Council elections on Jan. 25 represents a key step in the process of building a peaceful, democratic Palestinian state," the U.S. secretary of state said Wednesday.

Ehud Olmert, Israel's acting prime minister, said this week that Israel would allow Jerusalem Palestinians to vote, provided Hamas and other terrorist groups aren't on the ballot.

Rice welcomed Hamas' exclusion. "It remains the view of the United States that there should be no place in the political process for groups or individuals who refuse to renounce terror and violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm," she said.

Rice has said she opposes Hamas' participation generally, but believes it is a matter best left to the Palestinians.

U.S.: Syria still backing terrorism

Syria continues to harbor and back terrorists, including Hezbollah, the U.S. State Department said.

"The United States has grave and continuing concerns about Syria's destabilizing behavior and sponsorship of terrorism," the State Department said in a statement Wednesday.

"Syria's continuing provision of arms and other support to Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups serves to destabilize Lebanon, makes possible terrorist attacks within Lebanon, from Lebanese territory, and impedes the full implementation of Security Council resolutions."

Syria withdrew from Lebanon last year but U.S. sanctions will stay in place until Syria stops backing terrorists, controls its border with Iraq, ends programs to develop weapons of mass destruction and cooperates with a U.N. investigation into the assassination of anti-Syrian leaders in Lebanon.

A Hillel grows in Texas

A new Hillel building is slated to be dedicated at the University of Texas.

The new building on the Austin campus will be dedicated at a Feb. 5 ceremony. Mort Topfer, retired vice chairman of Dell, provided the lead gift of \$1.5 million for the building.

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon to top Kadima list?

Officials in Israel's Kadima Party are reportedly exploring the possibility of placing Ariel Sharon at the top of its list for Israel's upcoming elections.

Ehud Olmert, acting Israeli prime minister, still would serve as the party's prime minister.

Shimon Peres is second on Kadima's list for the March 28 vote, political sources said Wednesday. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who had been expected to get the second slot, instead was promised the Foreign Ministry if Kadima wins the election.

A Channel 10 television poll predicted that Kadima will take 44 of the Knesset's 120 seats, well ahead of the 16 seats seen for its closest rival, the Labor Party.

The Likud came in third with a predicted 13 seats.

Confrontation at West Bank outpost

Israeli police and settlers scuffled at an illegal West Bank outpost. Six settlers were arrested Wednesday for resisting efforts by

police and the army to demolish the outpost of Neveh Daniel, near Hebron.

Three policemen were hurt. Scores of settlers flocked to another illegal West Bank outpost, Amona near Ofra, after hearing that it also could be demolished.

Security sources said Amona was not scheduled for demolition until next week.

WORLD

British Muslim cleric blasts Jews

A Muslim cleric on trial in Britain for inciting hate said Hitler was sent into the world because Jews are blasphemous and dirty.

Abu Hamza al-Masri made the comments Wednesday in a London court.

He faces eight charges of soliciting murder against "non-believers," including four against Jews.

He also is charged with possessing video and audio recordings that he intended to distribute to foment hate. The trial is expected to last at least three weeks. He has pleaded innocent to all charges.

Boys attacked in Paris suburb

Two Jewish boys wearing yarmulkes were attacked in front of a train station in a Paris suburb.

According to the National Bureau of Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism, the 11-year-old boys were approached by four or five men of African and Arab origin, who hurled racial epithets at them before striking one of the boys to the ground and holding the other forcefully.

A 22-year-old Jewish man tried to intervene and was struck on the head, the chest, and grabbed by the throat.

The three victims were picked up by ambulance and taken to the hospital, while the aggressors fled on a bus. A police investigation is under way.

Warsaw Jewish community compensated

Warsaw's Jewish community recently received its biggest compensation deal since the government agreed to communal property restitution in 1997.

After an eight-year battle with Warsaw city authorities, the city has paid the community \$3.2 million in compensation for the site of the Round Synagogue in Praga, an area next to the Vistula River.

The synagogue, one of only a handful of round synagogues in Europe, was destroyed by the Communist regime in 1961, and the building now houses a theater and kindergarten as well as several other tenants.

The community plans to invest the money for long-term goals, explained Andrzej Zozula, community vice president and executive director of the Union of Religious Communities in Poland.

A decision about the best way to invest the compensation will not be made until after community elections in February, Zozula said.

Holocaust denier trial to resume

The trial of a Holocaust denier will resume Feb. 9 in Germany.

Ernst Zundel, a white supremacist who was a leading distributor of neo-Nazi literature in Canada, faces charges of inciting hate and denying the Holocaust.

He was deported to his native Germany in March 2005 after Canadian courts declared his Internet site unconstitutional.

His trial was delayed in November after the judge fired one of Zundel's lawyers.

Denying the Holocaust is a crime in Germany, but Zundel says both Canada and Germany are denying him the right to free speech.