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ARAB-JEWISH TENSIONS MOUNTING IN WEST BANK AND EAST JERUSALEM

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- As Israeli and Palestinian negotiators attempt to talk peace in Washington, relations between Jews and Arabs have deteriorated sharply in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The West Bank was especially tense over the weekend, as security forces, egged on by angry settlers, expanded curfews, barred Arabs from parts of main highways and conducted mass arrests in Palestinian towns and refugee camps.

Settlers, seeking reprisals for recent ambush attacks on Jewish vehicles rampaged through Arab towns for the second time in a week, causing extensive damage to Arab property.

The situation in East Jerusalem simmered meanwhile. Jewish settlers who won legal backing for their claim to property in the Arab enclave of Silwan last week were nevertheless placed under some restrictions by the courts, pending hearings on the complaints of evicted Arab families.

In the West Bank, the Israel Defense Force and police mounted joint operations that netted 25 suspects believed responsible for terrorist acts and a large arsenal of weapons.

Police sources said they were mostly "cold" weapons, such as knives, swords and hatchets. But they also uncovered some homemade handguns.

The sweeps were conducted in and around the Askar refugee camp near Nablus, where a settler's car was attacked driving to Eilon Moreh.

Another settler was shot at from ambush Saturday night near Tekoah, in the Judean hills. No one was hurt.

But settlers are still furious over the fatal shooting of Zvi Klein, a settler from Ofra who was driving through El-Bireh on Dec. 1.

Arabs Banned From Highways

El-Bireh and its sister town of Ramallah, north of Jerusalem, had been under 24-hour curfew since then. It was reduced over the weekend to a nighttime curfew, in effect from 4 p.m. to 5 a.m.

At the same time, however, Palestinian residents of the West Bank were banned from using sections of highway from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The ban applies not only to the pavement but to a strip nearly 500 feet wide along the major highways where they pass through uninhabited areas. Any Arab found in those areas during the curfew would be arrested.

The army said it was only one of several measures intended to reduce the opportunities for ambush. It had considered placing all of the highways under curfew but feared that would not stand up in court.

The IDF acted at the urging of settlers, who have long complained that security is lax. The settlers demand more severe punishment, including large-scale deportations of Palestinians suspected of violent acts.

But reserve Gen. Ori Orr, retired commander of the central sector, which includes the West Bank, said the new measures would prove ineffective, as they did when imposed in Lebanon.

Other military experts agreed. They said that more troops would have to be sent to the West Bank to enforce the ban, which could harm innocent citizens while terrorists would find ways to circumvent it.

On Sunday, Jewish vigilantes ranged through Ramallah for the second time since Dec. 9, smashing the windows of two homes and the windshields of eight Arab-owned cars.

Several settlers were detained for questioning but soon released.

Later Sunday, settlers in the Hebron area boasted that they had damaged 20 Arab vehicles in Hebron and nearby Halhoul.

A group calling itself the Committee for Security on the Roads, which is associated with the late Rabbi Meir Kahane's extremist Kach movement, took credit.

Shamir Condemns Vigilantism

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir condemned such actions Sunday, saying they are unnecessary.

Defense Minister Moshe Arens used stronger language, saying that vigilantism contributes nothing to security and warning that those who engaged in such activities would be prosecuted.

Arens made his statement near Eilon Moreh, where he met with angry left-wing Knesset members, who complained the government was doing little to stop anti-Arab violence by Jews in the administered territories.

Yossi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement said the settlers have begun an "uprising" against the state and its elected institutions.

If the government doesn't act to "suppress" it immediately, that will mean the "end of the democratic system in Israel, and things may develop into a civil war," he warned.

Sarid and fellow CRM Knesset member Dedi Zucker were in the area to plant olive trees in place of those uprooted last week by angry settlers.

But the settlers later uprooted the new trees and replanted them inside Eilon Moreh. Settlement leader Benny Katzover accused Sarid of "siding with Arab miscreants."

Meanwhile, the Jerusalem Magistrates Court issued a temporary injunction Friday ordering Jewish settlers to vacate one of the five Arab homes they occupied in Silwan last week, pending a court ruling on its ownership, which could come Monday.

The court limited the number of settlers allowed to stay in a second building to 10. It acted in response to complaints by two Arab families who said they were the legitimate tenants.

The settlers argued that the buildings belonged to two Arab families who departed the country in 1967. That left them in possession of the state, which, in turn, gave the Jewish families the right to move in.

Silwan remained quiet over the weekend. Hundreds of Israeli sightseers went there Saturday to inspect the scene of the controversy. A group of Peace Now activists visited, escorted by Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini.

They suggested to Arabs that they rent flats in predominantly Jewish western Jerusalem, to prove that "there too, money can buy anything."

So far, no one has acted on the idea.

SHAMIR SAYS CURRENT ROUND OF TALKS WITH ARABS WILL BE OVER BY WEEKEND

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- The present stage of Arab-Israeli peace talks in Washington will run its course this week, and the Israeli delegation will then come home, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told the Cabinet on Sunday.

He said Israel wanted to "exhaust" this round and not leave prematurely.

But Israel will continue to press hard for the next round of talks to be held in or near the Middle East, Shamir said. Whatever the venue, Israel's talks with the Palestinians are strictly limited to procedural issues.

There will be no delving into substantive subjects before there is a full-scale Cabinet debate, Shamir stressed. He indicated that such matters as autonomy for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would have to be approved by the Cabinet before they are put on the table.

Shamir also cast doubt that the multilateral talks on Middle East regional issues would open as scheduled in Moscow late next month, because of the fluid situation in the crumbling Soviet Union.

The bilateral talks in Washington ended their first week last Thursday on an uncertain note. The Israelis and Palestinians were mired in disputes over procedure, though both sides seemed genuinely interested in resolving their differences.

Israel's talks with Syria were reported to be extremely chilly and close to deadlock. But Israel's three sessions with the Lebanese delegation were described as businesslike and cordial.

Israel reportedly has a peace plan ready to submit to the Lebanese, but it would be contingent on the withdrawal of all Syrian armed forces from Lebanon.

Few details were revealed of Shamir's Cabinet briefing. But he appeared anxious to reassure his far-right coalition partners that Israel will make no offers to the Palestinians before they are thoroughly aired and approved by the Cabinet.

'On The Right Track'

His remarks seemed aimed especially at Yuval Ne'eman of Tehiya, who is minister of science and energy, and Rehavam Ze'evi of Moledet, who holds no portfolio. Both opposed the peace talks in principle and have threatened to pull their factions out of the Likud-led coalition if the Palestinians are offered any form of self-rule.

Judging from their remarks to reporters after the Cabinet session, they were reassured by Shamir's positions.

The prime minister also spoke briefly to reporters. He emphasized that the continued unity of the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation is a matter of principle on which Israel will not relent.

The Palestinians insisted last week on talking to the Israelis as a separate entity. The upshot was that their three days of meetings were conducted in the State Department corridors instead of in the conference room provided them.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, meanwhile, published an upbeat interview with the senior Jordanian negotiator in Washington, Dr. Abdul Salaam Majali.

Jordanians in official positions rarely allow themselves to be interviewed by the Israeli media.

Majali was quoted as saying, "I think we're on the right track." He said he believed the two sides were moving closer to a solution that would enable them to leave the corridors for the conference room.

Nevertheless, he thought that meeting "out in the open" had advantages. "It's good we sat where people could see us. Had we been closeted away, that would have immediately given rise to suspicions," said the Jordanian physician-turned-diplomat.

He appeared worried, however, about extremists on both sides trying to wreck the conference. He believed they would have a better chance if the talks were moved to the Middle East.

In fact, he was troubled by Israel's insistence on a Middle East locale. "If the talks are held close to our countries, the media will be there in force, and the extremists will be able to apply their pressures," Majali said.

"If we want to conduct relaxed negotiations, we must be far away" from the region, he said.

ARAB STATES AVOIDING DIRECT TALKS WITH ISRAEL -- BY PHONE, THAT IS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Although Israeli peace negotiators are talking face to face with Arab delegations in Washington, the Arab world seems to be determined to block telephone communication with Israel.

Jordan and the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar have appealed to international telephone companies not to cooperate with Israel's efforts to establish direct-dial service to Arab countries.

That had been the intention of Bezek, the Israeli government-owned telephone company, which hoped to begin direct dialing to neighboring Arab countries this week.

Bezek succeeded in launching a limited direct-dial service on a trial basis earlier this month. It quietly informed some of its clients in Israel and the West Bank that they could now dial anywhere in the Middle East.

Thousands of Palestinians have since used the service to talk to relatives and friends abroad. Until now, only Egypt has official direct phone connections with Israel.

Israelis have been fond of referring to the telephone metaphorically as an instrument for peace. Its leaders, at least as far back as Golda Meir, have lamented that the Arabs won't "pick up the phone" to talk peace.

Benjamin Netanyahu, a leading Israeli negotiator in Washington, has complained that the Arabs are "not answering our phone calls."

But the Arab countries say that when they signed the international telephone conventions several years go, they specifically excluded phone contacts with Israel.

LIVING COST BARELY ROSE IN NOVEMBER

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- The cost-of-living index rose by a barely perceptible 0.1 percent in November, an encouraging sign of lower inflation.

The figure, reported Sunday by the Central Bureau of Statistics, is one of the lowest monthly rises ever recorded. It was attributed mainly to a seasonal drop in the price of fruits and vegetables and a small decline in housing costs.

Spokesmen for both the Histadrut labor federation and the Manufacturers Association expressed cautious hope that the price index would remain low in the months ahead.

ISRAEL LOSING PATIENCE WITH U.N. OVER EFFORT TO FREE MISSING AIRMAN

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Israel appears to be losing patience with the United Nations' apparent failure to obtain information about Israeli servicemen missing in action in Lebanon.

In what appears to be a stepped-up public campaign, the wife of missing Israeli air force navigator Ron Arad will lead a demonstration outside the United Nations on Tuesday.

Israel is especially upset by the lack of progress made by outgoing U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who successfully brokered the release this month of the last American hostages held by Islamic groups in Lebanon.

Uri Lubrani, Israel's chief hostage negotiator, took Perez de Cuellar to task in what was described as a "difficult discussion" of the issue last Friday, according to a report in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

Lubrani co-chairs the Israeli team currently talking peace with a Lebanese delegation in Washington.

Perez de Cuellar had expressed optimism that all hostages, including Israeli MIAs held in Lebanon, would be accounted for by the time his tenure expired.

But he leaves office in two weeks with Israel as much in the dark as ever over the whereabouts of Arad and the fate of his fellow missing servicemen.

Lubrani and other members of the Israeli team were angered when the secretary-general and his aide, Giandomenico Picco, were honored by President Bush at a ceremony last Thursday for their role in freeing American hostages.

Neither Bush nor Perez de Cuellar alluded to the Israelis still in captivity. Lubrani contacted Perez de Cuellar the next day to complain.

Shortly afterward, the United Nations issued a news release saying that the "secretary-general is working hard on the matter of Arad, who is an important key to solving the issue of the hostage crisis and remaining prisoners."

Capt. Arad, an air force navigator shot down over Lebanon in 1986, is the only one of the Israeli MIAs presumed to be alive. But Israel has been unable to find out where and by whom he is being held.

BODY FOUND OF SECOND SOLDIER CARRIED AWAY IN A FLASH FLOOD

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- The body of a soldier was found in the Yarkon River last Friday more than 15 miles from where a flash flood swept his truck into a dry stream bed that had become a raging torrent during fierce rainstorms on Dec. 3.

The remains of Sgt. Maj. Natan Russo, 38, of Kfar Sava were retrieved with much difficulty hours after soldiers spotted it from a bridge over the Wadi Ayalon between Tel Aviv and Ben-Gurion Airport.

The fast-flowing stream, swollen by a fresh rainstorm, carried the body into the Yarkon River north of Tel Aviv, where army helicopters lowered two divers in an attempt to retrieve it.

The flood waters threatened to sweep it out to sea, where the Yarkon enters the Mediterranean. But the body was pulled ashore after it caught on the overhanging branches of trees standing in fields where the river had overflowed its banks.

The body of Russo's companion, Cpl. Amir Shabbi, 19, of Ramat Gan, was discovered a day after he drowned. Searchers believe Russo's body was caught and concealed by debris not far from where his truck overturned until it was loosened by the new storm and carried downstream.

GREEK PREMIER TO VISIT ISRAEL, OFFERS TO HOST MIDEAST TALKS

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis will visit Israel early next year, culminating the rapid improvement in ties between the two countries since his conservative New Democratic Party assumed power in April 1990.

Speaking here Sunday to members of the American Jewish Committee, the prime minister offered to host tne ongoing Middle East peace talks, specifically suggesting the island of Rhodes, site of the negotiations leading to the 1949 armistice agreements between Israel and its neighbors.

"We are interested in playing a role in this -- the role of friend," he said, referring to the negotiations.

"We stand with Israel on every issue," the Greek leader said, as he announced that his country was co-sponsoring the U.N. measure repealing the General Assembly's 1975 resolution denigrating Zionism as racism.

The Greek leader stressed both what he described as ancient ties between the Jewish and Greek peoples, and his own support for Israel.

One of the first acts of the Mitsotakis government was to recognize Israel, which the prime minister had previously visited as a member of the opposition.

"I can assure you the reaction of the Greek people to this decision was 100 percent positive," said Mitsotakis, who spoke through a translator.

"It's important American Jews understand the profound changes in Greece since April 1990," said David Harris, executive vice president of AJCommittee.

"We really should forget the unpleasant period behind us," the prime minister said, referring to the reign of his Socialist predecessor, Andreas Papandreou, who won a reputation of protecting terrorists.

Mitsotakis assured the breakfast audience that Greece is now working closely with the United States to fight terrorism, a policy manifested last week with the signing of an order to extradite Palestinian terrorist Abdulrahim Khaled to Italy. Khaled faces a life sentence there for plotting the 1985 hijacking of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro.

The prime minister suggested that some of his attitudes toward Israel and the Jewish community may derive from his experiences during World War II. An active leader of the anti-Nazi resistance in Crete, he was twice arrested and sentenced to death.

The Greek leader asked for Jewish cooperation in economic investment and tourism.

Mitsotakis specifically asked that Jewish groups consider including a visit to Greece among the events scheduled next year to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain. He pointed out that Greece received a large influx of Jews following the expulsion.

REVISIONIST USES SANTA CLAUS TO CHALLENGE FALSE-NEWS LAW

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- An attorney for Holocaust revisionist Ernst Zundel told Canada's Supreme Court last week that the law under which he was convicted could just as well have been used to go after people who believe in Santa Claus.

At a Dec. 10 hearing of Zundel's appeal in Ottawa, defense attorney Douglas Christie claimed that if the constitutionality of a law against "publishing false news" is upheld, "it wouldn't be impossible to prosecute someone for having a belief in Santa Claus."

All opponents would have to do is successfully demonstrate that belief in Santa Claus is detrimental to the public interest, he said.

In this latest of Zundel's bouts with the Canadian court system, he is appealing his 1988 conviction for knowingly publishing false news, after the Supreme Court in May agreed to let him broaden his constitutional challenge of Section 181 of Canada's Criminal Code.

Christie maintained that the law infringes on his client's constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and should be stricken from the books.

"These laws are really instruments of thought control, which should be avoided in a free and democratic society," said Christie, a Vancouver lawyer who has defended virtually every accused neo-Nazi or Nazi collaborator before Canadian courts.

Christie argued the false-news law could have a chilling effect on publishers, who might fear prosecution for promoting ideas that challenge accepted norms. He said Galileo, the 16th-century Italian astronomer, might have been convicted for spreading news that the Earth revolves around the sun.

Zundel Is No Galileo

A lawyer for the Ontario attorney general challenged this assertion, saying the law could be used only against people who deliberately spread lies that harm the public.

"In my opinion, Mr. Zundel is hardly in the position of Mr. Galileo," said W. J. Blacklock.

The federal and Ontario provincial governments maintain that the law is needed to "preserve social and racial harmony." Backing that position are B'nai Brith Canada and the Canadian Jewish Congress, both intervenors in the case.

Zundel, 52, was originally convicted in February 1985 of spreading false news with his publication of "Did Six Million Really Die?" a 32-page pamphlet claiming the Holocaust is a hoax designed to enrich Israel through reparations payments from Germany.

A 12-person jury found Zundel guilty and he was given a 15-month sentence. He appealed.

In 1987, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the legality of the false-news provision. But the court ordered a new trial because of several errors made by the judge.

In 1988, following a three-and-a-half month jury retrial, Zundel was again convicted and given a nine-month sentence.

A German national who never acquired Canadian citizenship, Zundel was also convicted by a Munich court last month of distributing hate material and was fined $20,000.

Should Zundel lose his latest challenge to Canadian law, he could face deportation.

CHORUS OF PROTEST ERUPTS IN ISRAEL OVER IPO DECISION TO PERFORM WAGNER

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- A public furor has arisen over the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's announcement that it will perform two works by Richard Wagner in a special concert later this month.

The state-sponsored orchestra in fact voted 39-12, with nine abstentions, to lift its ban on the works of the 19th-century German composer, an avowed anti-Semite whose music was idolized by Adolf Hitler.

They decided to include the overtures to the operas "The Flying Dutchman" and "Tristan and Isolde" in the program of the concert, to be conducted by Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim.

The IPO management agreed to excuse any member of the orchestra who does not want to take part.

But Knesset Speaker Dov Shilansky, a Holocaust survivor, begged the orchestra to reverse itself in the name of "countless other Jews affected by the Holocaust" who would be insulted if Israel's national orchestra played Wagner.

Heated public arguments have broken out since the announcement, some of them aired by Israel Radio, which will not broadcast Wagner's music.

The battle is not a new one in Israel. Many music lovers argue that great music should not be banned because the composer was a vile person. Others insist that anything redolent of Nazism has no place in the Jewish state.

The IPO predates the state, founded in 1936 by Bronislaw Huberman as the Palestine Philharmonic. Wagner was on the program of a concert it gave in Tel Aviv in 1938 under the baton of the anti-fascist Italian, Arturo Toscanini.

The orchestra played Wagner on a concert tour of Egypt during World War II.

Ten years ago, the IPO's Indian-born musical director, Zubin Mehta, attempted to include Wagner as an encore piece at a public concert. Much of the audience walked out.

Wagner raised another storm when it was played again at a special Friday afternoon concert several years ago.

Mehta and Barenboim say any orchestra which does not have Wagner in its repertoire is not an orchestra in the full musical sense of the word. They pointed out that the upcoming concert is not part of the subscription series, so no one will feel Wagner is being forced on them.

ISRAELI ARTIST MOSHE CASTEL DEAD

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Moshe Castel, a Jerusalem-born artist who achieved world renown and helped establish the famous artist's colony in Safed, died Dec. 12. His age was reported as either 82 or 85.

He was born to a prominent family descended from Castilian Jews that was expelled from Spain in 1492 and settled in Palestine.

Castel was educated at religious schools before he enrolled in the Bezalel Art School in Jerusalem in the 1920s. In 1927, he moved to Paris, where he continued to study and paint until the German invasion of France in 1940.

Although his paintings hung in major museums and galleries around the world, Castel was largely ignored in Israel during his final years.