

**ANOTHER ISRAELI STABBED TO DEATH
AS CURFEW ON GAZA STRIP IS LIFTED**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 8 (JTA) -- Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip this week stabbed to death a Jewish settler who employed them, bringing to four the number of Israelis murdered by Arabs in one week.

The killing of 39-year-old Uri Megidish occurred early Monday, just as the army reopened the Gaza Strip after a six-day closure prompted by an attack last week.

There appeared to be no end in sight to the rising tide of violence, as a Palestinian was shot dead later Monday during a clash with enraged settlers who were returning to the Gaza Strip after burying Megidish.

Palestinian witnesses said the slain Arab, identified as Naim al-Madhoun, 22, was shot by one of the settlers demonstrating at a road junction in the strip. But the settlers said al-Madhoun was shot by one of his companions.

The army said it was investigating the incident.

There was at least one other clash between settlers and Palestinians elsewhere in the strip, as well as the more common clashes between soldiers and Palestinians.

In Megidish's brutal murder, two Arab laborers fatally stabbed him as Megidish was driving them to his tomato greenhouse at the Jewish settlement of Gan Or.

The assailants then dumped Megidish's body at the greenhouse, where he was discovered shortly afterward by another Arab worker.

Megidish was married with four children.

The attackers' identities were apparently known, since they had been working for Megidish for the past few weeks.

Soldiers began a house-to-house search in the nearby Arab town of Khan Yunis, in an effort to capture the attackers.

PLO-Linked Group Claims Credit

The Hawks, an armed gang affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization's mainstream Fatah faction, claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Gan Or settlement is situated at the southern end of the Gaza Strip, between the Arab towns of Khan Yunis and Rafah. Most of its 40 families are farmers, and during this time of year, the peak tomato-picking season, the moshav employs more than 100 local Palestinians.

Even in the wake of the murder, local Jewish farmers said they had no choice but to continue hiring Palestinian laborers. They said unemployed Israelis did not want to come to work there.

Megidish's murder was the second in the area within a week. On March 2, an Israeli driver mistakenly entered Rafah refugee camp, where he was stoned by a mob and shot to death.

And a day before that, a Gaza laborer entered Israel proper and went on a stabbing spree, killing two Israelis in the heart of Tel Aviv.

It was the Tel Aviv attack that caused the army to seal off the Gaza Strip for six days,

preventing Arab laborers from reaching jobs in Israel proper.

On Monday, long lines formed at the Erez checkpoint between Gaza and Israel proper as the army adopted stricter security measures in an effort to filter out security risks.

But the added security did not stop Palestinian attackers; they just chose a target within the Gaza Strip.

Since the first attack in Tel Aviv, and now sustained by the murders in Gaza, a renewed public debate has been raised about whether Israel should unilaterally withdraw from Gaza.

The most outspoken supporter of such a move is Health Minister Haim Ramon, who reiterated at the weekly Cabinet session Sunday that Israel should set a timetable for its withdrawal from the strip.

But Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, as well as most other ministers, object to the idea.

Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said Monday that such a withdrawal would turn the strip into "the largest launching base for terrorist attacks in the world."

The opposition Likud party reacted strongly to the murder, saying it was further proof that the government's security policy is "bankrupt."

**ISRAEL ARRESTS FOURTH AMERICAN
LINKED TO FUNDAMENTALIST GROUPS**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, March 8 (JTA) -- Israel has arrested a Palestinian American in the West Bank village of Ramallah for engaging in hostile anti-Israeli activities.

Reports said the man, the fourth American of Palestinian origin recently arrested by Israel, was suspected of involvement with militant Islamic fundamentalist groups, the same accusation made of the three other U.S. citizens detained.

The man was identified as Anwar Hamdan, 33, from an undisclosed locality in Pennsylvania.

Hamdan, arrested Feb. 28, was expected to face formal charges in military court in a few days. Until that time, no further information about his arrest will be disclosed, said Oded Ben-Ami, Defense Ministry spokesman.

According to his lawyer, Hamdan arrived in Israel in January with his wife to visit relatives.

In Washington, the State Department said it had been informed of the arrest March 1 and that U.S. consular officials in Israel had visited Hamdan on March 4. Spokesman Richard Boucher would not comment further on the case, citing Hamdan's right to privacy.

Two other Palestinian Americans arrested in January are being held by Israel for organizing on behalf of the fundamentalist Hamas movement.

Mohammed Salah and Mohammed Jarad, both from Chicago, have been accused of distributing money to Hamas cells to help rebuild the organization following December's deportation to Lebanon of more than 400 men said to be Hamas leaders.

A third American detained in January was released by a military court.

Ben-Ami declined to comment on whether there was any connection between Salah and Jarad and the latest arrest.

U.S. ADMINISTRATION TO MAINTAIN CURRENT LEVEL OF AID TO ISRAEL

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 8 (JTA) -- The Clinton administration plans to maintain the current level of U.S. aid to Israel, a senior State Department official told members of Congress this week.

Edward Djerejian, assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs, told a House subcommittee Monday that President Clinton is committed to "continuing aid to Israel and Egypt at the current levels."

Since the mid-1980s, Israel has received \$3 billion annually, with \$1.8 billion going for military aid and \$1.2 billion for economic assistance. Egypt receives \$2.1 billion.

Djerejian's comments came four days after the U.S. ambassador to Israel, William Harrop, was quoted as saying that "it may prove difficult to maintain our economic aid" to Israel "at its current high level."

The State Department distanced itself from those remarks last Friday, but supporters of Israel have been concerned that the Clinton administration might cut foreign aid significantly in the current climate of financial sacrifice.

Djerejian also told the House panel that the administration is seriously considering releasing \$50 million of aid withheld last year from Jordan, in recognition of its support for the Middle East peace process.

The aid, originally earmarked for the 1992 fiscal year, was withheld because of U.S. concerns that Jordan was failing to comply strictly with international sanctions against Iraq following the Persian Gulf War.

Djerejian said the Clinton administration plans to follow through with the Bush administration's plan to sell Saudi Arabia 72 advanced F-15 jet fighters. He said the sale, worth more than \$9 billion, would benefit American suppliers, create aerospace jobs here and provide \$3 billion in tax revenues.

Loan Guarantees On Track

In over two hours of testimony to the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, Djerejian reviewed the progress of the Middle East peace talks and discussed Secretary of State Warren Christopher's recent trip to the region.

He pointed out that the trip had succeeded in shifting attention away from the issue of the 415 Palestinians deported by Israel in December, and said that the parties involved in the peace talks had expressed their willingness to resume negotiations.

Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), the subcommittee chairman, pressed Djerejian on the issue of continuing aid to Israel and Egypt at their current high levels, observing that the countries have economic problems not being quickly resolved.

Obey also criticized the current system whereby aid recipients agree ahead of time to purchase expensive military equipment, thereby locking the United States into maintaining high levels of aid to these countries, so that they can pay for the equipment.

Djerejian responded to this concern by arguing that if the peace process succeeded, "it would alter the defense burden of the countries" involved.

He argued repeatedly that aid to Israel and

some of the other countries in the region could not be reduced until the peace process had resulted in more normal conditions there.

But he acknowledged the current unpopularity of foreign aid, in a political climate where Americans are being asked to sacrifice.

Obey asked the assistant secretary about the status of the first \$2 billion in U.S. loan guarantees to Israel, part of the overall \$10 billion agreed on last year after a lengthy controversy.

Djerejian said that the two governments had signed an agreement in January authorizing the first \$2 billion to go to Israel.

The assistant secretary also told the subcommittee that Christopher had put the goal of cracking the Arab League's economic boycott of Israel and companies that do business with it "at the top of his agenda" with the Arab governments during his recent trip.

"It is not comprehensible," he said, that American companies would be discriminated against in the Persian Gulf after the United States had gone to war to protect the gulf countries from Iraqi aggression.

Djerejian said that the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council had privately agreed to remove companies from their domestic blacklist and not add companies to the list.

'That's Not Enough'

But Will Maslow, editor of the American Jewish Congress newsletter Boycott Report, said Monday that reports over the last few weeks have indicated that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are refraining privately from enforcing the boycott against American firms, while publicly maintaining the boycott.

"Throwing the Jewish community a bone, saying they're not enforcing it, that's not enough," Maslow said. He said his organization plans to ask the G-7 leading industrialized nations at their meeting this summer to work for an end to the boycott.

On the Middle East peace talks, Djerejian said "real progress" had been made since October 1991, when the talks opened in Madrid.

He cited "important developments" in the Israeli-Syrian negotiating track, about which various Israeli and American officials have expressed optimism recently.

He repeated the U.S. administration's desire to work as a "full partner" with the parties, as long as they remain seriously committed to the negotiations.

Djerejian said Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's upcoming visit to Washington could prove "very important" in continuing the strong U.S.-Israel relationship and in providing the "assurances Israel needs to make peace."

Rabin is scheduled to meet with Clinton next Monday.

Meanwhile, a bipartisan group of 11 senators this week sent a letter to the president expressing their "strong desire to work closely" with him "to further our mutual goal of strengthening American-Israeli relations."

The senators, members of the Senate Caucus on U.S.-Israeli Security Cooperation, suggested that military and technology cooperation between the two countries be increased "in order to strengthen both countries and reduce Israel's long-term dependence on foreign aid."

The letter was spearheaded by the caucus' two co-chairs, Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Richard Shelby (D-Ala.).

**WEST BANK TOWN NOW IN SPOTLIGHT
AS BIRTHPLACE OF BOMBING SUSPECT****By Gil Sedan**

JERUSALEM, March 8 (JTA) -- The West Bank village of Bidya, midway between Tel Aviv and Nablus, can boast of very few celebrities.

Four years ago, local youths ambushed the car of the village head, accusing him of collaboration with the Israeli authorities. The mukhtar, Shaker Abu Zeid, was inside the car when it was set on fire and was killed in the attack.

But since then, as the intifada swirled around it, the village has raised few headlines.

Until this week -- when scores of journalists flooded the small town of 6,000, seeking out the birthplace of Mohammad Amin Abed ar-Rahim Salameh, the suspect in the World Trade Center bombing in New York.

Salameh himself probably cannot remember much of his time in Bidya. He was born in September 1967, three months after Israel captured the West Bank in the Six-Day War. Two months later, Salameh's father packed up the family and moved to Jordan to work in the Jordanian army.

Salameh's family settled in Zarka, a city north of the Amman, and Salameh apparently never saw his birthplace again.

Reporters searching in Bidya for clues to Salameh's background were only able to find Salameh's grandmother, Amna Mahmoud Ode, who has remained in the village until today.

"He was good boy," said the 80-year-old woman, expressing confidence that Salameh could not have planted the bomb.

Ode said she last saw Salameh five years ago in Jordan, after he quit his studies in Islamic law at the University of Amman and just before he went to the United States in search of work.

Relatives said Salameh was the eldest of 11 children. Two years ago, his father retired from the Jordanian army as a lieutenant.

In Zarka, Salameh's family also defended his character, claiming he is "being persecuted."

"This is from the Jews, who have done this and blamed my son," The New York Times quoted his mother as saying.

HAMADEI TO BE RELEASED THIS SUMMER**By David Kantor**

BONN, March 8 (JTA) -- Abbas Hamadei, a Lebanese sentenced in Germany to 13 years in jail for terrorist acts, is expected to be released and deported from Germany next summer, seven years ahead of schedule, the German Press Agency reported.

The planned release is reportedly part of a deal worked out last year to secure the release of two Germans who had been held hostage for three years in Lebanon and were released last summer, the German agency said.

Officials sources have not neither confirmed nor denied the report. But sources in Bonn had made clear several times before that Hamadei could expect some kind of preferential treatment.

Abbas Hamadei was imprisoned for his role in the kidnapping of two other Germans in an attempt to free his brother Mohammed.

Mohammed Hamadei is serving a life jail sentence for the June 1985 hijacking of a TWA plane to Beirut and the murder of one of its passengers, U.S. Navy diver Robert Stetham.

According to the German news agency, there are no plans to release Mohammed Hamadei.

**HIJACK THREAT INTERRUPTS
A BELGIAN FLIGHT TO ISRAEL****By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, March 8 (JTA) -- A Belgian airplane en route to Israel made an emergency landing in Belgrade after a phony bomb and hijack threat was phoned into the airline's Tel Aviv office halfway through the flight.

Sabena Flight 203 from Brussels continued onto Tel Aviv after security officials checked the plane's passengers and baggage. The flight landed Sunday some nine hours behind schedule.

It was the first international flight to land in the Yugoslav capital since last summer, when a United Nations boycott restricted landings there to local and U.N. aircraft.

The Sabena A-310 Airbus with 136 passengers aboard, including a dozen German pilgrims, took off from Brussels at noon and was about two hours into its flight when an anonymous caller phoned Sabena's Tel Aviv office with a warning that four hijackers and a bomb were aboard.

The Tel Aviv manager immediately passed on the warning to Sabena's head office in Brussels, which instructed the pilot to land at the nearest available airport. Belgrade immediately agreed to the landing.

The plane was ordered to park in a far corner of the field. Passengers and crew were bussed to the terminal building some distance away and inspected and interrogated, while the aircraft and baggage were minutely examined by security police.

Passengers said Yugoslavian officials treated them well, but noted that the rundown airport terminal had the appearance of being virtually abandoned.

After nothing unusual was discovered, the plane took off again in the late evening.

**RUSSIAN IMPERIAL JEWELS
SHINE IN ISRAELI EXCHANGE****By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, March 8 (JTA) -- The Imperial Russian crown jewels, which have never before been shown to the public outside the former Soviet Union, have gone on display at the Israel Diamond Exchange in Ramat Gan.

The exhibition, billed as "The Treasures of Russia," comprises 150 rough and cut diamonds and other precious stones, historical objects from the 18th and 19th centuries and a wealth of gold and silver artifacts.

The jewelry, on display at the diamond exchange's Harry Oppenheimer Museum, was largely the work of European jewelers who went to the Czarist court to ply their craft.

Among them were jewelers of the House of Faberge, original designers of the famed Faberge eggs, which are encrusted with precious stones.

The collection itself was begun by Czar Peter I, who kept them in the Diamond Room of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.

During the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the treasures were transferred to the Kremlin and a special body, the Gokhran (State Depository of Russia), was established to care for it.

In 1991, the collection was placed under the authority of the State Department for Precious Stones and Metals. It is this body which finally, after months of negotiations, allowed the collection to begin a world tour at the Israel Diamond Exchange.

FAR-RIGHT GAINS AT GERMAN POLLS CAUSE CONCERN AMONG JEWS THERE

By David Kantor

BONN, March 8 (JTA) -- Electoral gains by the far-right Republican party, widely associated with neo-Nazi tendencies, has caused concern within the German Jewish community.

The Republicans won 8.3 percent of the popular vote in city and district elections held Sunday in the western state of Hesse. In Frankfurt, where the Republicans scored 10 percent of the vote, many Jews joined in a spontaneous demonstration against the Republicans in front of the Town Hall.

Frankfurt, a transportation, banking, and tourist center of Germany, is also home to the country's second-largest Jewish community.

The chairman of the German Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, said in an initial reaction to the poll results that he expected all the major parties to resist the temptation of forming political coalitions with the Republicans, even at the expense of losing power in some districts.

The Republicans campaigned on a platform calling for the expulsion of some foreigners from the country and a ban on allowing other refugees to enter Germany.

Representatives of the other major parties expressed disappointment and dismay at the extremists' strong showing.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Social Democratic opposition leader Bjorn Engholm promised Monday they would not make political deals with the Republicans and vowed to ensure that local party officials would follow their lead.

The results from Hesse show the Republican party as the fourth-largest political group in the area.

Returns from other major towns in Hesse show that the Republicans made a strong showing not only in Frankfurt but practically everywhere in the state.

In Hanau, the far right scored 14 percent, in Bad Homburg 9.1 percent, in Kassel 5.4 percent and in Offenbach 15.1 percent.

In several smaller communities, the Republicans drew as high as 20 percent of the vote.

In some towns, including Frankfurt, other neo-Nazis parties made remarkable gains. But they failed to draw enough support to penetrate local parliaments, for which a minimum 5 percent is required.

MAJORITY OF GERMANS BACK IDEA OF JEWISH PRESIDENT

By David Kantor

BONN (JTA) -- Fifty-three percent of the German public say they could accept the idea of having a Jewish president of the country, while 40 percent would object, according to a poll published in the weekly magazine Die Woche.

A proposal by Die Woche to nominate Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the German Jewish community, for the largely ceremonial post has recently become a matter of public debate, despite Bubis' rejection of the idea.

The poll, taken by the Dortmund-based Forsa-Institut, was conducted among 1,009 individuals who, according to the institute, represent the various groups in German society.

It was Die Woche that last month launched the idea of Bubis becoming the next president. The idea, the editors wrote, was to help Germany

confront its past and show the world how the country has changed immensely.

Bubis has said the time is not yet ripe for a Jew to become president of Germany.

The next candidate for the post will be chosen next year by the Bundesversammlung, a body composed of all members of the Bundestag and of representatives of the German states.

The chances of Bubis being chosen for the post are quite slim, even if he were to run.

U.S. LAWMAKERS PRESS ARGENTINA TO OPEN UP MORE FILES ON NAZIS

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 8 (JTA) -- A group of 36 members of Congress has sent a letter to Argentina's president urging his government to make good on his pledge to open all of its secret files on Nazi war criminals.

The Argentine president, Carlos Saul Menem, announced one year ago that he would open the files. But after an initial release of some documents, his government has shown little sign of acting further on Menem's pledge.

Jewish groups have been interested in the issue, in part because it is believed that Argentina once harbored the largest concentration of fugitive Nazi war criminals in the world.

In a move that could signal progress on the issue, the Argentine government has invited World Jewish Congress officials to come examine the files.

WJC President Edgar Bronfman will meet with Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella in Buenos Aires on Thursday to discuss the issue.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC, said Argentine officials had given the WJC "a flat-out commitment" that WJC researchers and historians from the Argentine Jewish community "will be given access to the files."

"We are convinced of their good faith," he said.

Steinberg noted that Menem had originally pledged to release the files in a meeting with WJC leaders in 1991.

The congressional letter, organized by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), calls for "prompt, full and complete disclosure of the contents" of the files.

Maloney said through a spokesperson that she expected the letter to "catch the attention of the Argentine government" and that she would "follow up with the ambassador of Argentina in the next few weeks" if no response was forthcoming.

The aide said that Maloney was motivated to organize the letter after reading media reports about the delay in implementing Menem's plan.

A small amount of information was made public at the time of Menem's original announcement, but since then, not much has been released. And the information that was released has been criticized for consisting primarily of photostat copies of newspaper reports.

During the reign of Gen. Juan Peron in the 1940s and 1950s, many Nazis lived in Argentina, including Josef Mengele, the doctor who performed sadistic experiments on inmates at the Auschwitz concentration camp, and Martin Bormann, Adolf Hitler's deputy.

Peron was known as an admirer of fascism and Nazism. He served as a military officer under Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini.