

**ON EVE OF ARAFAT'S VISIT TO GAZA,
RABIN ACCUSES RIGHT OF OVERTHROW PLOT**
By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 30 (JTA) -- Less than 24 hours before Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat was due to start his historic first visit to the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin accused Israel's right wing of plotting to overturn the government with mass street violence and an attack on government buildings.

In what Israel Radio described as an "unprecedented violent verbal attack on the opposition," Rabin charged that a massive financial campaign was being launched in Israel and abroad to organize demonstrations against the Arafat visit, scheduled to begin Friday afternoon.

The verbal attacks came as violence erupted near the Israeli border in Gaza, where members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement opened fire on Israeli soldiers traveling in a jeep.

Two soldiers were wounded, one moderately and one slightly, according to a military spokesman.

The gunmen, members of the Izz a-Din al-Kassam armed wing of Hamas, later claimed that the shootings were a "salute" to honor Arafat's arrival.

Rabin, meanwhile, forecasting a "very stormy weekend," told a Labor Party gathering on Thursday that settlers who have been encamped in a tent city opposite the Prime Minister's Office the past few weeks to demonstrate against the Israeli-Palestine Liberation Organization peace initiative were planning to engage in a confrontation in eastern Jerusalem.

"There are reports that the right-wing organizers are planning to move the tented camp from their present site near the Prime Minister's Office to the Old City's Damascus Gate to create tension between Jews and Arabs and cause a riot there," Rabin said.

A Flagrant Provocation

Such a move, he warned, would be a flagrant provocation aimed at the capital's Palestinian residents and would be dealt with swiftly and drastically.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said the right-wing campaign is not merely a struggle over conflicting visions of the fate of Israel, or even an attempt to undermine the peace agreement.

Instead, he said, it is an attempt to attack Israeli democracy.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal warned that the planned protests were in clear contravention of the law, but that the police were not planning to carry out any preventive arrests.

In an effort to ensure Arafat's safety this weekend, more than half of Israel's police force, together with thousands of Israel Defence Force soldiers, will be pressed into service.

Security forces will attempt to avert any violence against Arafat, who has been threatened by both anti-Arafat Palestinians and extremist Israelis.

They will also have their hands full if the promised demonstrations take place, particularly in Jerusalem, where Likud Mayor Ehud Olmert has said he hopes to organize some 500,000 Jerusalemites and others to create chaos in the capital to disrupt the Arafat visit.

Government sources criticized what they described as the anomaly of an elected mayor calling for mass demonstrations in the streets of his own city for political purposes.

Palestinian police officials indicated they will require no fewer than 4,000 security and administrative personnel for Arafat's visit to Gaza.

They said they will require an additional 1,200 security personnel if Arafat decides to visit Jericho.

Virtually all of the more than 800,000 residents of Gaza are expected to crowd into Gaza City by bus, car, on horse-back and on foot to catch a glimpse of their leader and hear him address the crowd upon his arrival Friday.

On Thursday, within hours after the PLO leader issued the surprise announcement that he was coming to Gaza on Friday, Rabin weathered a storm of protest provoked by his suggestion that the Arafat visit begin Saturday.

Rabin's request for a day's postponement aroused the fury of religious leaders, who protested vociferously at the mass desecration of the Sabbath that would result from tens of thousands of police and IDF personnel having to be on duty to ensure security during the visit.

When Egyptian officials asked for an earlier start to the visit, Rabin readily agreed.

(JTA Tel Aviv correspondent Hugh Orgel contributed to this report.)

**NJCRCAC TO RABIN: WE AGREE WITH YOU
ON ARAFAT'S RIGHT TO VISIT JERUSALEM**
By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, June 30 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's recent statement that Yasser Arafat can pray in Jerusalem has been seconded by an umbrella group of American Jewish organizations.

Leaders of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council wrote Rabin on Wednesday to "convey our support" for granting Arafat, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, "the same privileges to pray in Jerusalem as any other Muslim."

In spite of Rabin's proclamation, Arafat did not seem poised to make the pilgrimage during his first visit to Gaza, scheduled to begin on Friday.

The letter from Lynn Lyss and Lawrence Rubin, NJCRCAC's chair and executive vice chairman respectively, is significant because it comes at a time when American Jewry's support for an undivided Jerusalem threatens to conflict with its traditional support for the elected government of Israel.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert of the opposition Likud Party clearly believes the future of his city and the policies of Rabin's Labor government are at odds.

Earlier this week Olmert pledged massive

demonstrations to foil any Arafat visit, which he says would jeopardize the city's status.

And he promised to bring in Diaspora demonstrators to join him, saying that he had already booked a jumbo jet from Canada for this purpose.

This call was greeted with some support by some American Jewish groups.

Malcolm Hoenlein, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said his organization had not been approached about joining the demonstrations, and declined to take a stand on the invitation.

Explaining the purpose of the NJCRAC letter at this time, Martin Raffel, director of NJCRAC's Israel Task Force, said, "I'm sure there will be vocal opposition to Arafat's coming to Jerusalem among certain segments of the American Jewish community, but we didn't want that opposition to be interpreted as representing a majority of the American Jewish community."

Lyss and Rubin of NJCRAC, in their letter, noted that their group, comprised of 13 national and 117 community Jewish agencies, had earlier in June adopted a statement emphasizing the commitment of world Jewry "to maintain the city of Jerusalem as the eternal undivided capital of Israel."

But they said they agreed with Rabin that an attempt to bar Arafat would be inconsistent with his government's efforts to normalize relations with the Palestinians, and would contradict "Israel's exemplary record of maintaining open and unfettered access to the holy sites of all faiths."

Instead, they wrote, the most appropriate response to Arafat and anyone else questioning the status of Jerusalem would be to "increase our efforts to educate American policy makers and the public about the unique status of Jerusalem in the life of Israel and world Jewry."

CITING ISRAEL'S 'MORAL RESPONSIBILITY,' RABIN PLEDGES HELP FOR COLLABORATORS By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 29 (JTA) -- Saying that Israel has a moral responsibility to help Palestinians who collaborated with Israeli security authorities, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced this week the government will take special measures to help the collaborators and provide them with shelter in Israel.

Speaking before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday, Rabin said a special authority has been established to help collaborators relocate from their homes in the autonomous areas of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank district of Jericho.

The new authority, Rabin told the committee, has been budgeted with "large sums of money."

Reserve Gen. Shlomo Gazit, a former head of intelligence, has been appointed the authority's special adviser.

Every collaborator who wants to move to Israel, said Rabin, will be helped to do so and will be given an Israeli identity card.

Noting that there would be difficulties in arranging for their relocation, Rabin said the chief consideration must be ensuring their safety.

Palestinians suspected of helping the Israeli

authorities have long been targeted for revenge killings by fellow Palestinians.

Two weeks ago, the newly named justice minister of the Palestinian governing authority, Freih Abu Medein, said that Palestinians convicted of collaborating with Israel might be given the death penalty.

PALESTINIAN POLICE IN JERICHO REFUSE TO ACCEPT 220 NEWLY RELEASED PRISONERS By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 29 (JTA) -- Palestinian police in the autonomous area of Jericho in the West Bank refused Wednesday to accept 220 Palestinians released from Israeli prisons.

The prisoners, all of whom were residents of the territories still administered by Israel, had agreed to remain within the borders of Jericho until the end of their prison terms, an Israeli request justified under the terms of the agreement signed last month in Cairo for implementing Palestinian self-rule.

Israel Defence Force sources denied a claim by Palestinian security chief Jibril Rajoub that the prisoners had refused to sign a declaration that they would refrain from taking up arms against the peace process.

According to IDF sources, the prisoners had signed the declaration, but Palestinian authorities in Jericho had refused to accept them, claiming the area was already overcrowded.

FORMER EMPLOYEES AT DIMONA REACTOR SUE FOR DAMAGES FROM ALLEGED ACCIDENT By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 27 (JTA) -- Eighteen former employees at the nuclear reactor in Dimona have charged in a lawsuit that they developed cancer as a result of a 1968 nuclear accident at the top-secret, Negev-based plant.

The claim surfaced Friday on Israel Television, when the lawyer for one of the employees, Barak Ben-Amos, went public with the suit.

Ben-Amos claimed that he was exposed to dangerous levels of radiation when he and other workers were called upon to clean up the plant after the accident.

Ben-Amos stopped working at the plant soon after the alleged accident in 1968. He underwent radical stomach surgery at the end of 1991 for the removal of a cancerous growth.

Gideon Frishtik, his lawyer, said his client is seeking approximately \$330,000 in damages from the plant.

Frishtik said he knew of at least 18 other employees and former employees who had experienced medical problems similar to his client's.

One of these workers, Avraham Benvenisti, also appeared on television Friday and asserted that he had developed cancer of the bladder and had been operated on for the condition in 1988.

Benvenisti had worked at the plant for 30 years, and is also filing a damage suit against the plant.

According to news reports, Israel's Atomic Energy Commission denied on Sunday that any radiation had been leaked during the 1968 incident.

The agency rejected the workers' claim, saying the nuclear site is one of the world's safest.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**RABIN STILL TRYING TO WOO SYRIA,
DESPITE RECENT SOBERING DEVELOPMENTS**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 30 (JTA) -- The news concerning Syria has been gloomy of late.

Arms purchases to fuel a disastrous war that may loom just over the horizon; a continuing gap between Damascus and Jerusalem over the formula needed to advance the peace process; complicity in the disappearance of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad -- this is what the Israeli public has heard concerning Syria in recent weeks, from both news media and government officials.

But some political commentators say that in the topsy-turvy Middle East, much of the bad news may actually be good, as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin uses these developments to signal to the Syrians his seriousness about reaching an accord with them.

According to this school of thought, the expected visit by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher to the region in July proves that the possibility of advancing the negotiations between Israel and Syria is open.

Whatever Syria's intentions regarding reaching peace on terms acceptable to Israel, it has plainly not started down the path of disarmament. Israeli officials have leaked reports in recent weeks that Syria is once again purchasing modern weaponry from Russia, and on Tuesday, Rabin confirmed these accounts.

Briefing the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Rabin said Syria had obtained large numbers of the latest model T-72S tanks.

This followed a barely veiled prediction earlier in the week that Russia would soon make available to Syria its SA 10 ground-to-air missiles, equivalent to the American Patriots.

This prediction came from the Israeli air force chief, Maj. Gen. Herzl Bodinger, who said the air force was doing its best to study these missiles and develop measures to counter them.

For the Israeli public, however, news of these weapons came as little surprise, because an ominous possible future clash with Syria had already been sketched out by none other than Rabin himself.

Could Lead To War In Three to Seven Years

The premiere warned, late last week, that failure to reach agreement with Syria could well lead to war "within three to seven years."

Such a conflict could make Israel's experience in the 1991 Persian Gulf War "look like kid's stuff," the prime minister predicted. He noted that the Syrian array of ground-to-ground missiles was substantially more powerful and more threatening than the Scuds that were then at Iraq's disposal.

Rabin was widely criticized for sowing fear among the public. Opposition figures, and also independent commentators, argued that a national leader ought to ring out warning to a potential enemy, thereby strengthening his own country's deterrent posture.

Instead, they argued, Rabin dwelt on the vulnerability of Israel's soft underbelly -- that is, its civilian population, concentrated largely in the coastal plain around Tel Aviv and Haifa and furnishing a tempting target in an all-out war.

Similarly, his remarks to the Knesset committee, both on Syria's military programs and on his own readiness to trade land for peace with Damascus, triggered the by-now standard polemics between coalition and opposition members.

Rabin's supporters extolled the advantages of a comprehensive peace that would include the Syrian-Lebanese front, while the opposition underscored the value of the Golan Heights as a strategic bastion protecting the north of Israel. The critics were not comforted by Rabin's assurance that no settlements on the Golan would be dismantled in the first stage of a Syrian accord.

But political observers see Rabin's various comments as designed to signal to Syrian President Hafez Assad that Israel, having concluded the first phase of its interim agreement with the Palestinians, is more ready than ever to do business with Syria.

This same interpretation has been attached to the prime minister's repeated assertions during the past two weeks that the gap between the Israeli and Syrian positions regarding land-for-peace remains "very wide."

Signaling Israel's good faith, while insisting that much work needs yet to be achieved, is an obvious and well-tried method of prodding the other side in a negotiation.

And it seems to have worked -- at least to the extent of persuading the American secretary of state to try his luck on another Jerusalem-Damascus shuttle in mid-July.

Earlier, the secretary was reported to be reluctant to take to the road again, for fear of coming back with no progress to show for his effort.

Cool To Claim Syria Was Involved With Arad

By the same token, some observers this week noted the markedly low-key tone of official Israeli reactions to a German television program that claimed that Syrians were much more closely involved in the imprisonment of missing navigator Ron Arad than had previously been suspected.

Israeli officials cast doubts on the accuracy of the program's findings, and continued to focus the responsibility for Arad's life and well-being on Iran rather than Syria.

In the same vein, too, Bodinger took deliberate care in his briefing Monday to stress that the air force's ongoing actions against Hezbollah installations in Lebanon -- including some in areas of Syrian control -- are in no way designed to provoke or embarrass the Syrians. Damascus well understood Israel's motives and its purpose, the air force chief said.

But will this Israeli wooing of Syria work? Will it lead to movement in the Syrian position on the nature of the peace? Will it bring Syria to drop its demand for a commitment from Israel to total withdrawal from the Golan before a Syrian pledge to establish full normalization?

Assad, sphinx-like as always, has offered few clues to visiting Western statesmen, from whom Israel garners the information for its own assessments of the Syrian leader's intentions.

The gradual but significant return of Russia to the arena, both as an arms supplier (though now accepting only hard cash, not credit) and a political player, will clearly influence Damascus -- but to what extent remains a riddle.

GERMAN STRIKE FORCE ARRESTS NEO-NAZIS BUT CAN IT TURN BACK THE RADICAL RIGHT?

By Gil Sedan

TORGAU, Germany, June 30 (JTA) -- It was 5 a.m. on June 22, the start of a day that Philip Schmidt (a fictitious name) and a dozen of his neo-Nazi friends would likely remember for some time to come.

As day dawned, 60 police officers gathered at the picturesque Town Hall in this eastern German town, ready to strike at neo-Nazi youths.

In the best tradition of German precision, every detail was worked out advance. In a few minutes, the police would leave the building and knock on doors in different parts of this small town, population 21,300.

The purpose of the operation was to apprehend 11 youths who were suspected of having been involved in violent attacks on foreigners.

Embarking on the operation was a unique strike force bearing the rather awkward name of Special Commission to Combat the Violence of Rightist Extremists and Hatred of Aliens -- abbreviated in German to SOKO REX.

The force was established two-and-a-half years ago to combat the steep rise in neo-Nazi violence and political activity -- perhaps the single most alarming development in the former East Germany since the reunification of the two Germanys in October 1990.

"The police authorities were helpless at the time in the face of growing neo-Nazi violence," said Commander Bernd Moerbitz, 37, the man who has headed the force since its inception in December 1991.

"The phenomenon of the radical right was unknown at the time," said Moerbitz. "The young police force, still suffering from the shock of the transition from communism to democracy, didn't know how to cope with the young hooligans."

Are Police Raids Sufficient?

The new force, which is based in Dresden, capital of the eastern state of Saxony, was set up with the purpose of moving quickly to trouble spots and hitting hard at perpetrators of violent acts to prevent escalations of neo-Nazi violence.

It operates with the widest reach of any unit of its kind in Germany. Indeed, violent acts against foreigners in Saxony dropped from 287 in 1992 to 79 last year. And Moerbitz noted that some 90 percent of right-wing perpetrators of violent attacks are caught.

But the question remains whether such police raids are sufficient. Police statistics indicate there are some 1,000 neo-Nazis in Saxony alone.

Moerbitz is concerned that unless sufficient measures are taken, neo-Nazis could become better organized and pose a great threat.

Similar views were expressed by Marita Schifferdeker Adolph, of the Dresden municipality, working two years with eastern German youths.

"These youths pose a real threat to society," Schifferdeker Adolph told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "I am shocked by the anti-Semitic and anti-alien views held by them, with no apparent reason."

Much of her alarm stemmed from the fact that most of these youths have never even met a Jew. There are hardly any Jews living in Saxony.

A number of incidents prompted the police

action last week in Torgau, some 30 miles north of Dresden.

On June 6, a Pakistani asylum-seeker was attacked near a discotheque here. His assailants struck with baseball bats and cattle prods. On the same day, a youth club that serves as a meeting place for young foreigners was vandalized.

Almost three weeks later, Nguyen Van Dien, Vietnamese owner of a local restaurant, suffered serious wounds in an attack by a group of hooligans who clubbed the man with beer bottles.

That same night, Moerbitz switched on his computers to hunt for suspects known to be involved in the extreme right. Among the scores of arrests which followed, three suspects confessed to having taken part in the attacks.

They also led police to 11 more suspects.

An hour after the operation began, at exactly 6 a.m., police squads were knocking on the doors of suspects.

Philip Schmidt, 20, lives in a the basement of a nice suburban house, in typical teen quarters. He had no apparent reason to be an angry young man. He had a decent home, work, friends.

He is not identified by his real name because under German law he cannot be identified until a judge issues a warrant for his arrest.

His parents were surprised to find a couple of polite police officers knocking at their door with a search warrant in the early morning hours. They could not understand what they wanted.

"I wasn't there," was the only statement Philip Schmidt made as he left the house, handcuffed, led by the police to their waiting car.

But later, during a day-long interrogation, Schmidt and his friends blamed each other for the violence. Police said they would probably press charges against all of them. If convicted, they could each get as many as three years in jail.

"Can we prevent the spread of the right?" Moerbitz asked with clear skepticism. "I don't know. But for sure we have to keep on trying."

CHAIRMAN OF GERMAN JEWISH FEDERATION IS SUBJECT OF GERMAN TV DOCUMENTARY

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, June 30 (JTA) -- Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Jewish federation in Germany, was the subject of a 30-minute documentary film that was broadcast on German television Wednesday night.

Titled "48 Hours in the Life of Ignatz Bubis," the camera follows the Jewish activist as he meets with Jewish legislators and with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his political opponent Rudolf Scharping of the Social Democrats.

In the documentary, Bubis says he respects Kohl, "although I did not forget his visit to Bitburg," the cemetery where SS soldiers are buried and where they were honored by Kohl and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in April 1985.

Bubis tells the interviewer that he lives with guilt for having survived the Holocaust while his father was killed at the Treblinka death camp. For this reason, he says, he refused for years to talk about his past.

One of the most physically protected people in Germany, Bubis says he lost his fear in 1943, when the Holocaust eclipsed all other fears, and he says he finds the bodyguard detail assigned to him "exaggerated."