

**IN SWEEP OF HAMAS, ISRAELI FORCES UNCOVER PLANS FOR SUICIDE ATTACKS**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Security forces this week arrested dozens of members of a Hamas cell, possibly averting at least two planned suicide bombings against Israelis, the Israeli army has announced.

Some 40 suspected Hamas members based in the West Bank were arrested in the sweep by General Security Service agents and soldiers, an army spokesman said.

Among those arrested were several Palestinians who allegedly helped the terrorist, Salah Assawi, when he carried out the Oct. 19 suicide bombing of a bus in the heart of Tel Aviv that killed 23 people, including Assawi.

But army sources said that Yehia Ayash -- nicknamed "the engineer" for his work with explosives and who was believed to have masterminded the Oct. 19 attack as well as others -- still remained at large.

During their searches in the West Bank, security forces found a large cache of chemical components used for making explosives, ammunition, skullcaps similar to those worn by Jewish settlers and Israeli army uniforms.

Suspects told investigators that two attacks were being planned in Petach Tikva and near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

Military sources said that a total of some 400 Hamas activists in the territories have been arrested recently in a crackdown on the Islamic fundamentalist group.

In related news, two Palestinians from eastern Jerusalem have been charged with complicity in the kidnapping and murder of Israeli soldier Cpl. Nachshon Waxman.

The Lod military court charged the two, Zachariya Najab and Jihad Ya'amur, with giving shelter to Waxman's kidnappers and with belonging to Izz a-Din al-Kassam, the military wing of Hamas. They were remanded in custody until the proceedings against them have been concluded.

ISRAEL AND SYRIA TRADE ACCUSATIONS AS CHRISTOPHER PREPARES NEW SHUTTLE

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- With U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher due in the Middle East next week to continue American mediation efforts between Jerusalem and Damascus, Israeli officials say they will agree to resume direct peace talks with Syria only if there is something to talk about.

The issue of direct Israeli-Syrian negotiations, which were broken off last February, resurfaced this week when Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa said that Israel had turned down a Syrian offer to resume direct negotiations in Washington.

Speaking in Brussels, Sharaa said the issue was raised during President Hafez Assad's talks with President Clinton last month in Damascus.

"There was a negative answer from Israel's

side," Sharaa told reporters. "Syria has openly stated she is ready to resume peace talks if Israel responds positively to the results of the Clinton-Assad meeting, but there has been no such response."

Sharaa also said his country would normalize relations with Israel if Israel fully withdrew from the Golan Heights. His remark was believed to be the first time a Syrian official spoke of establishing normalized relations with Israel.

But in Israel, officials said the Syrians have still not done enough to begin a serious dialogue.

Speaking to a closed forum of Labor Knesset members, Rabin reportedly said that there has been no progress on a number of crucial issues, including security arrangements, the phases of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan and normalization of ties. Rabin has also suggested that the clock is ticking toward a deadline on negotiations with Damascus.

"If there is no progress in the Israeli-Syrian track by the end of 1995, a peace agreement between the two countries will not be reached during the tenure of this government," he was quoted as saying in the Israeli daily Davar. Elections are scheduled for 1996.

Meanwhile, in the absence of any direct talks, Christopher is scheduled to conduct his sixth round of shuttle diplomacy between Damascus and Jerusalem. He is scheduled to arrive in the region on Monday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**CURRENT SCHOOL PRAYER CRISIS MARKS LATEST CHAPTER IN DECADES-OLD DEBATE**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Despite all the hype over school prayer these days, the issue is hardly new.

The emerging school prayer battle is merely the latest chapter in a decades-old saga that has often pitted courts against lawmakers and students against school authorities.

While the new Congress holds the best chance to return prayer to America's schools for the first time since 1962, opponents and advocates alike agree that students are still a long way from legally organized prayer in school.

Nonetheless, the push on the part of the new Republican leadership in Congress to pass a school prayer amendment has revived discussion about what role religion historically has played in the American classroom.

Until 1962, most students began their school day with some form of organized prayer, whether it was the Lord's prayer or other Christian readings -- and in some predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, selections from the Bible.

But all that changed in 1962 with a landmark Supreme Court decision that dramatically altered the country's landscape on this issue.

By striking down a New York state law recommending a non-denominational prayer in all classrooms, the court effectively declared school prayer illegal.

The court strengthened this decision, Engel

v. Vitale, one year later when justices ruled that all school-sponsored prayer and Bible readings in public schools were unconstitutional. The court included voluntary prayer in its ruling.

In two companion cases -- Abington Township School District v. Schempp in Pennsylvania and Murray v. Curlett in Maryland -- the court ruled that even laws that permitted students to be excused during prayer time violated the principle of separation between church and state.

Taken together, the 1962 and 1963 decisions sounded the death knell for legal prayer in America's public schools.

Although court decisions spanning the next three decades generally continued to stifle prayer in public schools, about half of the 50 states currently have some law pertaining to school prayer.

"The most broadly violated Supreme Court decision in the history of this republic is the ban on organized prayer in schools," said Jerome Chanes, co-director for domestic concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, an umbrella group of 13 Jewish organizations and 117 local communities.

Although most of the laws currently on the books call for moments of silence, some states, in apparent violation of the Supreme Court rulings, allow for student-led classroom prayer.

And in many rural areas of the country, prayer continues today unchecked, despite the Supreme Court's efforts and many state legislative battles to block attempts to circumvent the court's decisions.

"Many southern communities had to be dragged kicking and screaming into abolishing prayer in public schools. At best there has been reluctant, minimal compliance," said Charles Whittenstein, who recently retired after serving over 20 years as the Anti-Defamation League's southern civil rights director.

As an example, he noted that some rural schools in Georgia continue to allow students to recite prayers over intercom systems.

"Court edicts continue to be violated and ignored but we've made slow progress ending prayer in schools," Whittenstein said.

'Court Edicts Continue To Be Violated'

By the 1980s, federal courts had continued to expand the official ban on prayer to all school functions, including assemblies and athletic events. Included in the dozens of rulings that addressed this issue was a specific ban preventing students from volunteering to recite prayers for school assemblies or classes.

In an effort to circumvent these court decisions, many states began to cloak their school prayer laws as moments of silence, according to observers.

In Alabama, such a moment of silence law was challenged all the way to the Supreme Court by students who were beaten when they refused to bow their heads during prayer time.

In that case, *Wallace v. Jaffree*, the Supreme Court declared the Alabama law unconstitutional in 1985. The justices said that the state legislators' intent when they crafted the law was to promote school prayer in public schools.

In contrast, some lower courts have found legislation on moment of silence to be within the bounds of the Constitution.

But opponents of school prayer continue to argue that in practice, teachers and students frequently use the time for proselytizing and vocalized prayer.

The courts and the states continue to wrangle over the issue.

Over the past two years Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama have enacted moment of silence laws, according to Robert Peck, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Mississippi law was declared unconstitutional by a U.S. District Court and is currently under appeal. The ACLU is planning to challenge the Alabama and Georgia statutes, Peck said.

The Virginia law has not been implemented, Peck said.

During President Clinton's term as Arkansas governor, he pushed a moment of silence law for the state that would comply with the 1985 Supreme Court decision. The state repealed the law last year after officials decided it was unnecessary and not being used by school districts.

"I have always supported a moment of silence when I was a governor," Clinton said at a Nov. 22 news conference.

Clinton Against Constitutional Amendment

Responding to outrage after the president appeared conciliatory to Republican plans to push a constitutional amendment on school prayer, Clinton said, "I do not believe that we should have a constitutional amendment to carve out and legalize teacher or student-led prayer in the classroom.

"I think that that is inherently coercive in a nation with the amount of religious diversity we have in this country," Clinton said.

One of the more recent issues to emerge as part of the school prayer imbroglio centers on prayer at school graduation ceremonies.

In the most prominent court case, *Lee v. Weisman*, the Supreme Court ruled in 1992 that prayer at a public school graduation violated the Establishment Clause.

In an effort to appease Jewish students, a Rhode Island high school had chosen a rabbi to give an invocation after Jewish families had voiced opposition to prayers at graduation ceremonies.

But a Jewish student sued, bringing the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court decided in the student's favor, ruling that graduations are school functions and should not include prayers.

But that decision took a new twist in *Jones v. Clear Creek Independent School District*, also in 1992. The U.S. Court of Appeals, in a Texas case, attempting to distinguish between coercive and non-coercive graduation prayers, ruled that it is constitutional if students vote for prayer at their graduations. In a move puzzling to school prayer opponents who saw no justification for such a distinction, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of the case in 1993.

And the issue continues to make headlines. On Nov. 18, in *Harris v. Joint School District #241*, a U.S. Court of Appeals, ruling on an Idaho case, appeared to use the 1992 Supreme Court ruling as a precedent, saying that students cannot select prayers for graduation.

(JTA intern Jennifer Batog in Washington contributed to this report.)

14 JORDANIAN YOUNGSTERS ATTEND HAIFA FESTIVAL ON FIRST TRIP TO ISRAEL

By Michele Chabin and Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Noshing on traditional Chanukah jelly doughnuts and grasping Israeli and Jordanian flags, 14 youngsters from Amman were among the first Jordanian tourists to visit Israel on Monday.

The children, ages 7 to 14, were invited to Israel to take part in the Festigal, a two-day music festival celebrated annually in Haifa on Chanukah.

After making their way across the newly opened northern border crossing between Israel and Jordan, the Sheikh Hussein Bridge in the Beit She'an Valley, the Jordanians were greeted by 20 Jewish and Arab teens from the Haifa area bearing flowers and singing "Heveinu Shalom Aleichem."

One of the Jordanian children, 9-year-old William Shimali, had a few words to say in Hebrew to his Israeli counterparts:

"All the children my age want to live in peace, without war. I say happy holiday on Chanukah, Merry Christmas, thanks and God bless," he said.

Another child named Donna, 10, credited the leaders of Israel and Jordan for affording her the chance to visit Israel.

"Thanks to (Prime Minister Yitzhak) Rabin and (Jordanian King) Hussein, it was arranged for us to come today and to meet our friends beyond the border. May God be with this peace agreement. We hope to have a long-standing relationship with the children of Israel," she said.

As part of their two-day visit, the children were greeted by Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna and attended a Chanukah party at a local high school.

Second Jordanian Group Visits Eilat

But the high point was definitely the Festigal, in which top Israeli entertainers perform before thousands of local schoolchildren.

During the festival's finale, the Jordanian children joined Israelis singers in a moving rendition of "I Believe," a song about the fruits of peace.

Israeli-Jordanian cooperation was also in evidence in the south of the country on Monday, when a dozen Jordanians, most of them businessman, entered Eilat from the nearby Jordanian city of Aqaba.

They were received by Eilat Mayor Gabi Kadosh, municipal officials and by schoolchildren bearing Jordanian and Israeli flags.

The visitors, most of whom were in the tourism industry, said they were moved by the warm reception. They said they were happy to be among the first Jordanian tourists to visit Israel since the two countries signed a peace treaty.

While they said they came to Israel to sightsee, some were looking toward business.

Among them were Aqaba-based travel agent Ali Elhendawi. Making his second visit to Israel -- the first was made on his foreign passport -- he said he was discussing the possibility of a joint Jordanian-Israeli venture with the owner of Eilat's Petra Hotel.

"I'd like to set up a Bedouin tent near the hotel," Elhendawi said. "There would be Arab music, Arab food."

He noted that "within a short time, perhaps within a few months, Israel will have visitors from the Gulf States, and they will want to find something familiar."

MAN IN JAIL FOR 32 YEARS FOR REFUSING TO GIVE WIFE A GET IS NOW IN ILL HEALTH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- An 82-year-old man who has been in prison for 32 years for refusing to give his wife a get, or a religious bill of divorce, may soon be released on grounds of ill health.

Yihye Avraham, who has been in prison longer than any other Israeli, was given an open-ended sentence by a rabbinical court in 1962.

Jewish law stipulates that both husband and wife must agree to a divorce, although only a man can actually give the get. Israeli law allows imprisonment as a method of last resort to put pressure on a stubborn spouse.

Avraham has stubbornly refused to grant the divorce, explaining that he loved, and still loves, his wife, Ora, who is 66.

Prison sources, who describe him as mentally disturbed, say he is also in ill physical health.

Avraham suffered a stroke Saturday night and was taken to a nearby hospital.

A legal adviser to the Israeli Prison Service is expected to decide this week whether Avraham should be released.

Ora Avraham first applied for a divorce after 12 years of marriage.

"His behavior was abhorrent. He treated me like chattel," she said in an interview published last year.

The couple was married in their native country of Yemen when Ora was 12 and Yihye was 28. She bore him two daughters, but he reportedly berated her and abused her for not bearing sons.

When Ora left her husband at age 24, the couple was already living in Israel.

Israel follows religious law in matters of marriage and divorce, and Yihye was duly ordered to remain behind bars until he granted his wife the get.

TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS IN ISRAEL STILL UP

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Despite attempts to heighten public awareness about road safety, the number of fatal accidents on Israeli roads continues to increase.

Seven people were killed in road accidents throughout the country Monday, bringing the death toll so far this year to 480 -- a 10 percent increase over the number of traffic deaths during all of 1993.

If fatalities among Israelis living in the territories are included, the death toll for the year so far rises to 600.

In a separate development, Police Minister Moshe Shahal told the Knesset's Internal Affairs and Environment Committee this week that one car is stolen in Israel every 25 minutes.

The number of car thefts had risen from 12,000 in 1986 to 26,000 so far this year, Shahal said, adding that fewer than half of the cars reported stolen are ever recovered.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
OLIM JOIN ISRAELI CIVIL GUARD
TO HELP BRIDGE CULTURE GAPS**
By Michele Chabin

MEVASSERET ZION, Israel, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Sometimes, the culture gap between new immigrants and veteran Israelis can prove dangerous, even deadly.

Just ask Jonathan Davis, an immigrant absorption official at the Jewish Agency.

During the many years he has dealt with olim and their adjustment problems, Davis noticed that few immigrants know what to do in potentially dangerous situations.

"If an oleh sees a suspicious object (that may be a bomb), he may not know what action to take. No one has ever taught him not to touch the object and to call the police," he said.

"Or take house theft. Many immigrants don't know how to secure their homes against burglars, and when there is a burglary, they don't know how to explain what has been stolen," he added.

Even running a red light can pose a problem, Davis said. "Often, when the police stop an immigrant, they don't speak the same language. Sometimes, small incidents turn into big misunderstandings."

In an attempt to prevent such misunderstandings, the Jewish Agency last year initiated a program that promotes interaction between immigrants, police officers and members of the country's volunteer Civil Guard.

Launched in a number of communities with large immigrant populations, the program "is already reaping results," Davis said.

"A year ago, we had hoped to sensitize police and Civil Guard volunteers to the special needs and customs of immigrants," he recalled. "At the same time, we tried to recruit immigrants into the Civil Guard, to help them integrate into Israel society and to serve as a bridge between two cultures. I'd say we have met both goals."

350 Police Officers Participate

So far, some 350 native Israeli police officers have participated in seminars designed to familiarize them with cultural differences.

They learned, for example, that the Israeli method of defusing a tense situation, whether it be a terrorist attack or a domestic conflict, could actually make matters worse when dealing with police-wary Russians, headstrong Americans or Israel's many other immigrant groups.

Army and Border Police officers who took the seminar learned that if an Ethiopian suddenly disappears from active duty, it may be because of a sudden illness or death in the family.

"Ethiopians drop everything and return home when they hear about a crisis," Davis said. "Most of the officers in the course were unfamiliar with this and many other traditions and were grateful for the new insights."

The recruitment portion of the program has brought more than 200 immigrants into the 70,000-strong Civil Guard. An integral part of Israeli law enforcement, the Civil Guard is a deterrent force as well as an important resource in times of trouble.

When two Islamic terrorists opened fire on a Jerusalem pedestrian mall on Oct. 9, for example, Civil Guard volunteers were the first law-en-

forcement personnel on the scene. Firing their M-1 rifles, they slowed the terrorists down until the police and army arrived.

During a recent patrol with the Civil Guard in the town of Mevasseret Zion, a mountaintop community near Jerusalem, it soon became clear that the immigrant volunteers were getting as much from the program as they were giving.

The patrol, which on this drizzly night was composed of one police officer and a half-dozen volunteers, represented a veritable melting pot of immigrant society.

Riding around the neighborhood in a police van, the team -- composed of immigrants from France, Russia, Ethiopia and Yugoslavia -- looked out for anything suspicious, such as an abandoned car or suitcase, prowlers and car thieves.

Though all seemed quiet at first, halfway through the evening the local police notified the patrol that residents of the absorption center had spotted a "suspicious person."

Coming so soon after recent terror attacks on Israelis, the volunteers were especially alert. Their language skills came in handy when they had to question the immigrant who made the call.

A thorough search of the area turned up nothing, however, so they continued their patrol.

Miriam Katan, a 22-year-old immigrant from Yugoslavia, says she joined the Civil Guard almost as soon as she entered Israel.

"I thought it was important to defend my country," she said, adding that the experience helped her decide upon a career path: She is about to join the police force.

For Avraham Rada, a 55-year-old Ethiopian who has been in Israel nine years, "the decision to join the guard seemed natural," he said. "I saw theft and crime in the community and I said, 'I live here, too, and I need to help.' I have two children in the army and I also want to contribute."

"I thought (joining the Civil Guard) would help me meet Israelis and smooth my absorption," said Miriam Shamla, 19, from France. "I've made a lot of friends this way."

Yosef Shamla, a 47-year-old Frenchman and Miriam's father, noted that "in addition to getting a great deal of satisfaction out of volunteering, I'm also able to help my neighbors in the absorption center."

MUSLIMS, JEWS GATHER FOR MIDEAST PEACE
By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 29 (JTA) -- Muftis from Damascus and Tunis joined Israeli religious and political leaders in an international conference held in Madrid this week to support the Middle East peace process.

The gathering, called "Three Religions: Committed to Peace," assembled Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders from around the world to discuss the ongoing peace process.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was among the participants in the conference, which was sponsored by King Juan Carlos of Spain.

Other members of the Israeli delegation were Israel's ambassador to the Vatican, Shmuel Hadas, and Labor Party Knesset member Dalia Itzik.

Muslim representatives from Indonesia and Malaysia, Catholic archbishops, Vatican officials and business leaders also participated.