



NEWS AT A GLANCE

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■ **U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross failed to extract an agreement from Syrian President Hafez Assad to resume talks between senior Israeli and Syrian military officers.** The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Assad refused to resume the talks, and that he stood fast on his demand for equal security arrangements to be part of any peace agreement between the two nations. [Page 2]

■ **More than 1,000 former inmates of the Buchenwald death camp gathered to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the camp's liberation by American forces.** Among the speakers at the ceremony, held in the central German city of Weimar, was Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau.

■ **The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a bill that includes full debt relief for Jordan.** Republican leaders in the Senate included the Jordanian debt provision in an attempt to thwart a threatened presidential veto of the bill, which also calls for cuts in domestic programs.

■ **The first American Jewish delegation is scheduled to arrive in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar on Tuesday.** The four-person American Jewish Committee delegation traveled to Bahrain and Oman over the weekend. The group planned to ask for support for the Middle East peace process and to push for normalized relations with Israel.

■ **German authorities are reportedly concerned that neo-Nazi groups have the means to manufacture poison gas.** The fear surfaced as a result of "obscure substances and chemicals" found during a nationwide raid of about 80 apartments of neo-Nazis late last month. [Page 4]

In wake of two Gaza attacks, Israelis debate whether to go on

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 9 (JTA) — Israeli leaders disagreed this week about whether to continue the peace process with the Palestinians in the wake of Sunday's two terror attacks in the Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin vowed Sunday that the peace process would continue, saying the terrorists were out "to murder the peace."

But President Ezer Weizman, along with at least one Cabinet member, called for a suspension of the negotiations with the Palestinians.

"We have to take some time to look at the situation anew," Weizman said. "This was a grave attack."

At least seven Israelis were killed and dozens wounded in the two terror attacks in the Gaza Strip on Sunday. The Israel Defense Force said four male and two female soldiers were among the dead.

The IDF identified the soldiers as Staff Sgt. Yuval Regev, 20, of Holon; Staff Sgt. Meir Sheinvald, 20, of Safed; Sgt. Etai Diner, 49, of Rishon Lezion; Sgt. Zvi Nirbet, 19, of Rishon Lezion; Sgt. Netta Sufrin, 20, of Rishon Lezion; and Cpl. Tal Nir, 19, of Kibbutz Mefalsim. The name of the civilian casualty was not immediately made public.

The first attack took place shortly before noon Sunday near the Gaza settlement of Kfar Darom.

Six people were killed and about 30 wounded when a car bomb blew up next to an Egged bus carrying soldiers and settlers. The bus was traveling from Ashkelon to the Gush Katif bloc of settlements in Gaza along a road jointly patrolled by the IDF and the Palestinian police.

The suicide bomber drove an explosive-laden van into the bus near Kfar Darom, detonating the charges and causing massive damage.

Helicopters evacuated the wounded to local hospitals. Residents of the area said the site of the attack was a vulnerable one, adding that shooting incidents had taken place there in the past.

Arafat accuses militants of using Gaza as 'launching pad'

The Islamic Jihad fundamentalist group claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement, the group identified the suicide bomber as Muhammed Al-Khattib.

The organization said the attack was in response to the April 2 explosion at a bomb factory in Gaza City, which killed at least six people, including a leading member of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement.

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat blamed the explosion on Hamas, which in turn accused Arafat and Israel of conspiring to set off the blast.

Israeli security officials had been expecting terror attacks in the wake of the Gaza City explosion.

The second attack Sunday took place two hours after the first, when a car bomb exploded near an Israeli border police jeep near the settlement of Netzarim.

Hamas, in a phone call to an international news agency, claimed responsibility for that attack, in which one person was killed and nine were injured. Hamas denied that the two attacks had been coordinated.

In a statement issued Sunday from Los Angeles, President Clinton condemned the terror attacks, but said the attacks should not prevent Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization from reaching their goal of a regional peace.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of these terrorist outrages," the Clinton statement read. "But those responsible must not and shall not be allowed to deny a better future of hope and reconciliation to the region."

On Saturday, one day before the two attacks, Arafat accused Muslim extremists of using Gaza as a "launching pad" for attacks on Israelis.

Arafat, who issued the statement after the weekly meeting of the Palestinian Authority, said the ongoing terror attacks were meant to embarrass his self-rule government and to give Israel a "pretext for delaying its withdrawal from the West Bank."

Palestinian security officials have reportedly arrested several children

younger than 11 who were allegedly being trained to carry out suicide bombings against Israelis.

On Sunday night, in the wake of the two attacks, Palestinian officials detained more than 100 suspected Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists in Gaza.

Arafat phoned Rabin on Sunday to extend condolences to the victims' families and to reiterate his commitment to fight terror.

Rabin and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak traveled Sunday to the site of the first attack.

Shahak told reporters that most of the passengers on the bus were soldiers who were returning to protect Jewish settlements in Gaza after their weekend leave.

Rabin said a government-imposed closure of the territories will continue in an effort to prevent future terrorist attacks from taking place inside Israel. The closure, imposed by Israel in the wake of previous terrorist incidents, prevents tens of thousands of Palestinians from working in Israel.

Rabin said he will demand that Arafat take steps to fight terrorist groups operating in Gaza. But he added that the peace negotiations will continue.

"We will not stop the peace talks," said Rabin. "We will demand from them to prove, here in Gaza, that they can fight against" the terrorists.

The Cabinet was holding its weekly meeting when the attack near Kfar Darom took place.

Ministers emerged from the session saying continuation of peace talks would depend on Arafat's ability to meet his commitments.

"I think this attack requires us to do some serious thinking about the July 1 target date," said Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, referring to a deadline previously set by Israel and the PLO to complete negotiations on Palestinian elections and an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

In contrast, Environment Minister Yossi Sarid of the dovish Meretz bloc called for an acceleration of the peace talks.

He also rejected criticisms he elicited from members of the opposition for remarks he made over the weekend suggesting that the isolated Netzarim settlement should be dismantled.

"They are again blaming us for terror attacks, instead of blaming the Hamas," Sarid told reporters.

Meanwhile, the Knesset was scheduled to convene in a special session Wednesday to discuss the two latest terror attacks. □

U.S. peace envoy fails with Syrian-Israeli talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 9 (JTA) — Israel and Syrian peace negotiations remained at an impasse this week, after U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross failed to extract an agreement from President Hafez Assad to resume talks between senior military officers.

After six hours of talks in Damascus, Ross returned to Israel over the weekend, where he briefed Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on his discussions.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Assad refused to resume the talks, and that he stood fast on his demand for equal security arrangements to be part of any peace agreement between the two nations.

Israel and Syria have been divided over Damascus' demand for symmetrical security arrangements, such as the size of demilitarized zones on either side of the border, and troop scaledowns.

Leaving the prime minister's residence after talks

Saturday, Ross told reporters, "We have to prepare the ground well for such a meeting [between military officers] to be productive, and there is still a lot to do."

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich, said, "There has been some incremental progress, and we will continue."

Rabinovich and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Muallem, recently resumed talks in Washington at the ambassadorial level. Assad had abruptly cut off military and diplomatic talks in December.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher convinced Assad to resume the ambassadorial talks during his shuttle mission to the region last month.

Ross flew to Cairo on Sunday to brief Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on his latest peace shuttle. □

Settlement meeting nixed after ministers voice doubts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 9 (JTA) — Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin canceled a meeting this week concerning building in the territories after three ministers expressed doubts about the expansion of West Bank settlements.

The ministerial committee had been scheduled to discuss plans for the construction of about 5,000 housing units in the West Bank. The committee was created in January after controversy erupted over expansion in Efrat, a Jewish settlement in the Gush Etzion bloc.

The three officials expressing doubts were Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Communications Minister Shulamit Aloni and Justice Minister David Libai, Israel Television reported.

Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer was supposed to have submitted a plan for approval that called for the construction of 1,800 homes in the Orthodox settlement of Kiryat Sefer; 3,000 units in Ma'aleh Adumim, east of Jerusalem; and 800 units in Givat Ze'ev, northwest of the capital.

In addition, the housing minister was expected to seek approval to sell or rent 85 of 200 homes in Karnei Shomron that were built by the government, but never put up for sale.

The Peace Now movement welcomed the cancellation of the meeting, saying any extension of settlements undermines the peace process.

But members of the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza said Rabin knuckled under to Palestinian opposition. □

Argentina updates Israel on bombings

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 9 (JTA) — Argentina reportedly has new information that could lead investigators to the terrorists responsible for the bombings of the Jewish community headquarters and Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

In July 1994, terrorists attacked the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. A bomb ripped apart the building, leaving about 100 dead. In 1992, the Israeli Embassy was blown up, killing 29.

Last week, Yair Tsaban, Israel's immigrant absorption minister, was in Argentina. He met with President Carlos Menem, who updated him on the situation. Neither would elaborate on the progress, saying they did not want to impede the investigation.

However, Menem stressed Argentina's commitment to find the perpetrators. He said the judge who is heading the investigation has been relieved of other obligations in order to focus on the case. □

Nation of Islam probed again as HUD secretary makes amends

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, April 9 (JTA) — A month after one federal investigation cleared security firms affiliated with the Nation of Islam of any wrongdoing, another federal agency has started to investigate a Nation of Islam affiliate that receives federal funding.

At the same time, Henry Cisneros, the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development who oversaw the initial investigation, has sought to make amends with Jewish leaders who were outraged over his findings.

In correspondence and meetings with the World Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith International during the past few weeks, Cisneros has sounded a conciliatory tone.

In an April 3 letter to World Jewish Congress official Rabbi Marc Schneier, Cisneros denounced Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan's hate speech and labeled HUD's investigation "ongoing."

"Certainly only harm can come when such hatreds and divisions are injected into the national discourse by religious leaders or as religious dogma, as minister Farrakhan has done in his references to the American Jewish community," Cisneros wrote.

His remarks contrasted sharply with those he expressed at a Capitol Hill hearing on the issue last month.

During the hearing, Cisneros said HUD's investigation of the Nation of Islam was complete and further investigations would "simply be using government resources to persecute" the organization.

Charge of discriminatory practices

Further incensing Jewish groups, the secretary compared the Nation of Islam contracts with the federal government to federal grants to B'nai B'rith International to run housing projects for the elderly.

For the past year, Jewish activists and members of Congress have been calling on the administration to examine Nation of Islam-affiliated businesses that receive government funding through contracts. They charge that the virulently anti-Semitic organization discriminates against whites in its employment practices.

In his letter, Cisneros said HUD would continue to investigate questions about payroll taxes owed by some firms; unlicensed guards at Chicago and Baltimore housing developments; and other contract violations.

According to a Chicago Tribune series last month examining Farrakhan's financial empire, since 1991, Nation of Islam-affiliated security companies have won more than \$15 million in government contracts in nine cities, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Security is the most lucrative of Farrakhan's businesses, which include ventures in cosmetics, medicine, food, media and clothing, according to the Tribune.

The newspaper articles said many of the businesses are not financially sound. The Internal Revenue Service has filed liens worth more than \$350,000 against the Washington security firm NOI Security and is trying to collect taxes from another business, the Tribune reported.

Activists had mixed reactions to Cisneros' overtures.

Some said that even though Cisneros' condemnation of Farrakhan was welcome, he did not acknowledge HUD's responsibility to investigate the Nation of Islam.

"For all of Cisneros' nice words in the letter, he doesn't say, 'We're going to pursue the employment discrimination,'" said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

Others applauded his efforts to mend the rift with

the Jewish community. "We're delighted that HUD has found its voice, first in denouncing the racism and bigotry in minister Farrakhan's speech, and that they have indicated that the investigation is ongoing," said Abraham Foxman, the Anti-Defamation League's national director.

Tommy Baer, president of B'nai B'rith International, met with Cisneros last week. Baer said he was "satisfied that the secretary understands the Jewish community's sensitivities to the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam."

Meanwhile, the Department of Health and Human Services has launched an investigation into a Washington AIDS clinic affiliated with the Nation of Islam.

The investigation is focusing on patient discrimination at the Abundant Life Clinic, which is run by Farrakhan's national spokesman, Abdul Alim Muhammad.

The clinic, a source of alternative treatment for African Americans with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, receives more than \$500,000 in federal funding through contracts with local health offices.

News of the latest investigation elicited cautious approval from activists. "The fact that they are investigating is something that we welcome," said Mark Pelavin, AJCongress' Washington representative. Pelavin said his group had been pushing HHS Secretary Donna Shalala to investigate for a year. The agency's slow response was "troubling," he said.

And in light of HUD's earlier investigation, AJCongress and others expressed concern over how HHS would pursue the case. "It would be important to ensure that the limited and incomplete investigation that HUD conducted not be repeated elsewhere," said Michael Lieberman, ADL's Washington counsel.

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), who has introduced legislation that would ban federal contracts to Nation of Islam-affiliated companies, welcomed the HHS investigation. "We would applaud that," said Daniel Michaelis, King's press secretary.

AJCongress has also asked the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance to get involved in the investigations. The office has not responded, Pelavin said. □

Israel, Jordan want removal of U.N. monitors of armistice

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, April 9 (JTA) — Israel and Jordan have asked the United Nations to withdraw the observers that have been monitoring their 1949 armistice agreement for nearly half a century.

The request, made last week to U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, reflects the terms of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed in October.

The observer force, known as the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization, has been in place since Israel and Jordan signed the armistice agreement in the aftermath of the war of 1948, when Israel's Arab neighbors responded to the establishment of the Jewish state by declaring war.

The force now has 217 military observers.

Most of them are working as adjuncts to other U.N. forces supervising Israel's truces with Lebanon and Syria, and to the multinational force monitoring the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

Israel's Jordanian front, the only one to see no military conflict since 1967, has been the only border under the sole supervision of the truce supervision group.

According to Israeli sources, Israel has asked the United Nations for an immediate withdrawal, while Jordan has requested a more gradual reduction. □

Germans fear poison gas as latest weapon of neo-Nazis

By Gil Sedan

BONN, April 9 (JTA) — German authorities are concerned that neo-Nazi groups have the means to manufacture poison gas, the mass-circulation Bild newspaper reported last week.

This latest concern surfaced as a result of "obscure substances and chemicals" found in a nationwide raid of about 80 apartments of neo-Nazis late last month, the paper reported.

The Bild quoted a secret report of the Federal Criminal Bureau. According to the publication, one investigator said, "We have reason to believe that rightist extremists will no longer shy [away] from poison gas terrorist attacks."

The revelations come as a human rights group reported that right-wing harassment of foreigners, Jews and homosexuals increased in 1994.

There were 1,040 anti-Semitic crimes reported in 1994, a 60 percent increase over the previous year, according to Human Rights Watch, a U.S.-based group.

In contrast to the increase in harassment, violent attacks decreased from 2,232 cases in 1993 to 1,233 in the first 11 months of 1994, the group reported.

The group praised Germany for its efforts to combat these problems.

Three days after the apartment raids last month, German police struck a major blow at neo-Nazi groups when 231 skinheads were apprehended while traveling to a concert in the eastern German town of Triptis.

In the apartment raids last month, German police also found various weapons and ammunition and illegal anti-Semitic propaganda published by neo-Nazi Gary Lauck of Nebraska, who heads the National Socialist German Workers' Party-Foreign Organization.

Germany has since asked for the extradition of Lauck, who is being held in Denmark.

But the chemicals have authorities particularly worried in the wake of last month's gas terror attack in the Tokyo subways, another investigator told the German newspaper.

Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel has expressed concern that the Tokyo attack represents a new method in international terrorism.

Meanwhile, German police continued their crack-down on neo-Nazi activity last week. On April 6, they broke up a neo-Nazi rally in Ludwigsburg and reportedly seized knives and illegal racist writings. Also, in Dortmund, a court handed down suspended sentences and fines to 11 neo-Nazis who had harassed leftists and covered walls with neo-Nazi graffiti. □

Swiss Jews want memorial for refugees refused by state

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, April 9 (JTA) — Jewish leaders here plan to petition the Swiss government to erect a monument to the Jewish refugees who died when Switzerland closed its gates to those fleeing Nazi Germany during World War II.

Swiss Jews recently circulated the petition within their community, and will present it to the government May 8, the 50th anniversary of the Allied victory over the Nazis.

During the war, Jewish refugees who crossed the German border into Switzerland were turned back on the orders of Heinrich Rothmund, then the Swiss chief of police.

The police chief was following official orders. At the time, Rothmund spoke out against the refugees, saying their unrestricted entry would lead to the "Judification of Switzerland."

Citing the Swiss government's wartime actions, the Jewish community's petition read, "As a result of that policy, thousands of innocent Jewish people were turned back at the border, to the mercy of the Nazis, which in most cases meant death in the extermination camps."

The petition also supported a recent initiative by Helmut Hubacher, the eldest member of the Swiss Parliament. On Feb. 1, he appealed to the government to apologize officially for its wartime policy regarding Jewish refugees.

Last year, the Swiss government for the first time opened portions of its wartime archives to researchers.

Israeli researchers, working alongside Swiss officials, found at the time that some 20,000 to 30,000 Jewish refugees were turned away at the Swiss border during the war. Previous official Swiss figures had put the total at 10,621 Jews.

That period in Swiss history has also prompted a government minister to weigh in against his government's wartime policy.

Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti, speaking before the Commission on Jewish and Christian Relations, recently apologized for the government's decision to turn back Jewish refugees at the border. "It is indispensable to remember the way in which Jews were sent back in the dark days" of World War II, he said, adding that "Switzerland does carry responsibility for this barbarous attitude."

During his speech, Cotti also mentioned the isolated Swiss officials who refused to follow the policy toward Jewish refugees. He singled out for praise the efforts of Carl Lutz, then Swiss general consul in Budapest, who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews by issuing fictitious passports. After the war, Swiss authorities reprimanded Lutz for not following government instructions.

Another high-ranking Swiss official, Minister of Defense Kaspar Villiger, is scheduled to give a speech about the Swiss government's wartime actions in a May 7 speech in the Bern Cathedral, according to a local newspaper report.

The Swiss government is expected to hold a formal debate on its wartime policies in the near future. □

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Bonn contributed to this report.)

Rabin asks business world to assist in peace process

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 9 (JTA) — Addressing a meeting last week of the largest regional bank in the world, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called on the world business community to assist in the Middle East peace process.

Rabin, speaking to more than 2,500 leading bankers and businesspeople attending the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank, thanked the organization for choosing Jerusalem as the venue.

"In the name of the government and people of Israel, we look at your decision as a sign of recognition of the changes that have taken place in the Middle East," Rabin told the gathering. Many of the nations represented by the bank do not view Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

During the session, Jacob Frenkel, governor of the Bank of Israel, was elected chairman of the board of the development bank. Israel has been a member of the bank since 1976. □