



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Former Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy quit the main opposition Likud Party and announced that he would lead a new party as a candidate for prime minister in the country's general elections next year.** Levy had been expected to bolt from Likud after announcing recently that the party's electoral procedures were biased against his supporters.

■ **Gunmen belonging to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement killed three Israeli soldiers and wounded three others during fighting in the southern Lebanon security zone.** Israeli officials charged that Iran and Hezbollah are attempting to disturb Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations, which are scheduled to resume soon in Washington. [Page 2]

■ **An Israeli Jew was stabbed in the back when an Arab attacked him near the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's Old City.** The man, who was lightly wounded, managed to walk to a police station in the Muslim Quarter, where he received first aid. Police officials said this was the fifth stabbing of an Israeli in the Old City during the past two months. [Page 3]

■ **Palestinian security prisoners began a hunger strike, demanding their release from Israeli prisons.** Reports that Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat was joining the hunger strike to show solidarity with the prisoners were denied by Palestinian officials. Some 6,000 prisoners are being held in jails in Israel and the West Bank. [Page 3]

■ **Ireland's foreign minister, Dick Spring, said he would visit Orient House, the Palestine Liberation Organization's de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem, despite protests from Israeli officials.** Terming the visit a courtesy call, Spring said, "It is consistent with European Union policy that I visit there."

■ **Israel's cost of living index for May rose by 1 percent, which was higher than expected, the Central Bureau of Statistics announced.** Housing prices, which went up by 1.6 percent, were the main factor accounting for the increase. Inflation for 1995 now stands at 2.2 percent, the bureau said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Taking on the world of politics, Sharansky outlines latest goals

By Uriel Masad

JERUSALEM, June 18 (JTA) — Natan Sharansky wanders into the lobby of a Jerusalem hotel, speaking Russian into a cellular phone.

Short, stocky and unassuming, he is dressed casually, wearing the military cap that has become his trademark.

A man crosses his path and stops in his tracks as he recognizes the famous former Soviet Jewish activist and Prisoner of Zion, and extends his hand.

"I, too, am an oleh, a veteran oleh," he declares in Hebrew, referring to himself as an immigrant.

"Then join our movement," says Sharansky.

Earlier this month, at a highly publicized, well-organized conference in Tel Aviv, Sharansky launched "Yisrael ba-Aliyah" — a new ideological and political movement.

Speaking before about 200 olim activists and reporters from the Israeli and foreign media, Sharansky announced in Hebrew, then in Russian, the movement's goals: to change Israel's national priorities regarding aliyah — with the immediate aim of bringing an additional 1 million olim from the former Soviet Union — and to better use the potential of the olim already here.

The name of the movement, "Yisrael ba-Aliyah," has two implications in Hebrew: "Israel for immigration" and "Israel moving upward."

After Sharansky's address, a string of speakers stood up and in the three minutes allotted them, explained their reasons for supporting the new movement. Alexander Rubny, a young Russian man from the coastal town of Or Akiva who wore a T-shirt with "San Francisco" printed on it, spoke of the important role of young people in the movement.

Adis from Ethiopia was received with applause as he talked of cooperation among all olim, whatever their origin.

Zvi Weinberg, a veteran oleh from Canada and former activist with the Free Russian Jewry campaign, bemoaned the terrible waste of the great potential of the olim.

Michael Nudelman, a councilman from Kiryat Shmona, spoke of the unpleasant stereotypes many Israelis have of olim. He also spoke of the immigrants' eagerness to contribute.

They all stuck to the themes of aliyah and absorption, staying clear of such issues as the peace process or the relationship between synagogue and state.

New party could wield crucial swing vote

The conference's main objectives were listed in a kit each participant received upon arrival: a nationwide membership drive, election of a steering committee to prepare a national convention and the naming of Sharansky as the leader of the movement that is likely to turn into a political party for next year's elections.

This is not Sharansky's first foray into politics. He backed away from a political party for olim just before the 1992 elections. The party, DA, went on to run anyway, but failed to win sufficient votes to put a representative in the Knesset.

Some 750,000 people from the former Soviet Union currently live in Israel, arriving mainly during two immigration waves, one during the 1970s and one since 1990. Of these olim, an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 are eligible to vote in Israel's 1996 national elections.

Opinion polls indicate that at least 45 percent would vote for a party representing olim. This could translate into the election of six to seven Knesset members for Sharansky's new party, which aims for the center of Israel's political map. If Labor and Likud fail to win a parliamentary majority, Sharansky's party could wield the power to determine which major party will govern the country.

Sharansky, who with his wife, Avital, has two sabra daughters, does not look 47 years old.

He explains that in Soviet prisons there was a belief that one is not

completely free until one has spent as much time outside as inside the prison.

Sharansky was released nine years ago, after having spent as many years in prison. This, he says, explains his youthful looks, as he feels only 38, discounting his prison years.

He also says that "those nine years in prison helped me a lot in my nine years in Israel."

Sharansky exudes irresistible charm, has an engaging sense of humor and a poker face. The light blue eyes that give him an aura of innocence turn steely when he thinks he is being misunderstood, or worse, misinterpreted.

He prefers to speak to a reporter in English so that his quotes do not need translating.

A leading journalist recently described him as soft on the outside and hard as a diamond on the inside.

Although Sharansky thinks that Israel is paradise and "the best place for Jews," he said that "even in paradise you must take moral responsibility for some not good things which are happening, and try to improve this paradise."

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Iron Curtain, Sharansky sees a historically unique opportunity to strengthen the Jewish people.

"While we're dealing a lot with the building of the State of Israel, we're practically not dealing with the building of the people of Israel," he says, citing the founding fathers of the Zionist movement who had the vision to deal with both issues.

Sharansky angered by paternalism

Sharansky says he wants to reshape Zionism and transform Israel from serving as a safe haven for refugees into an attractive place for prospective olim — not only those from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but also from the United States.

"We must have an active strategy, find out what must be changed in order to become attractive to the Jews of the world," he says.

"I believe that the more Jews will come, the quicker these changes will take place. We'll bring another million Jews from Russia, and the country will change so much that another million American Jews will come."

When he was still living in Russia, Sharansky says, he put Israelis on a pedestal, thinking of them almost as demigods. He laughs heartily at the suggestion that he may now see them as less than human, and is quick to deny it.

Yet he faults Israelis for their paternalistic attitude toward Diaspora Jews and olim, and for losing their "Yiddisher kop" — their Jewish smarts.

Sharansky is clearly angered by this paternalistic attitude, which may explain his refusal to join any of the major political parties, though he has been courted by all of them.

He believes that every party and most extra-parliamentary movements deal mainly with the issues of peace and security, but neglect the people of Israel.

Sharansky remains noncommittal on issues other than aliyah and absorption, which are the prism through which he views most everything else.

On the questions of security and the peace process, he says, "Without the hope for peace, you cannot convince people to come here. On the other hand, without national and personal security, there can definitely not be 'kibbutz galuyot' — the ingathering of the Jews."

For him it is all a question of priorities. He suggests that those who believe in the concept of a Greater Israel vote for extreme right-wing parties and those who think that the Palestinians should have their own state vote for the dovish Meretz bloc.

"But if you believe that it's very important to have a party which will strengthen the idea of building the people of Israel, I think you should join us," he says.

Asked whether he will run for prime minister, Sharansky laughs.

"My ambition is much bigger than to run for one or another office, including the office of prime minister," he says. "My ambition is to bring millions of Jews to Israel." □

Hezbollah kills three Israelis as Israel, Syria set new talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 18 (JTA) — With Israel and Syria poised to resume negotiations in Washington, Hezbollah violence has flared up again in Lebanon.

Three Israeli soldiers were killed and three others wounded Sunday, when gunmen ambushed a patrol in the southern Lebanon security zone.

Two of those killed — Sgt. Maj. Hani Mohammed el-Heib, 27, and Sgt. Maj. Hasham Rahal, 29 — were Israel Defense Force trackers from the Bedouin community of Beit Zarzir in the Jezreel Valley. The third person killed was identified as Sgt. Hillel Rosner, 19, of Tel Aviv.

The wounded soldiers were flown to a hospital in Israel, where the condition of one was described as moderate. The other two were lightly wounded.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah fundamentalist movement claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel's Cabinet was holding its weekly session when news of the attack first arrived.

Security officials briefed Cabinet members on the initial details of the incident, which drew renewed calls from government ministers that Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, act to restrain Hezbollah activities.

Some ministers said they expected the latest flare-up in southern Lebanon to come up at the end of this month in Washington, when top-level Israeli and Syrian military officials meet to discuss security arrangements tied to achieving a peace agreement between the two countries.

Last week, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sent a strong message to Syria via American intermediaries, calling on Damascus to restrain Hezbollah.

The message was sent in the wake of a series of Katyusha rocket attacks last week that were launched by Hezbollah on residents of northern Israel. Eight Israelis were wounded in the assaults, which also caused extensive property damage.

Damascus has not yet responded to Rabin's message.

The latest incident occurred about 8 a.m. Sunday, when an Israeli unit came under anti-tank and machine gun fire while on patrol in the security zone. After an initial inquiry into the incident, the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and the head of the northern command, Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, praised the unit for following correct procedures after they came under attack.

Radio reports from Lebanon said two Hezbollah gunmen were killed during the exchange of fire.

The Israeli casualties came toward the end of the clash, when two rockets struck the patrol.

Meanwhile, Uri Lubrani, the official in charge of Israeli policy in Lebanon, said that only a political solution would halt the hostilities in Lebanon.

"There is no military solution to the situation in South Lebanon," he told Israel Radio. "Hezbollah is exploiting every opportunity to halt the peace process."

"If Israel takes massive [military] measures in response, that is exactly what the Iranians and Hezbollah want," he added. □

Museum formalizes role as a voice against genocide

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, June 18 (JTA) — The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has formalized its role as a voice against genocide and mass murder around the world.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Council, which serves as the museum's board, last week voted to establish a permanent Committee on Conscience to raise public awareness against acts of genocide and their precursors.

In voting to establish the committee, the council said it was fulfilling part of the original charge given to it by the presidential Holocaust Commission, which in 1979 urged the museum's creation.

The commission called for the creation of a Committee on Conscience to "alert the national conscience, influence policy-makers and stimulate worldwide action to bring acts of genocide to a halt."

"It is a moral mandate on our part" to speak out if genocide and mass murder is about to take place, said Miles Lerman, chairman of the council.

"Had the world spoken up, had public opinion been more aggressive, the Holocaust wouldn't have taken place, and had it taken place, it would have been with a lesser ferocity and more people would have been saved," said Lerman.

The absence of a formal committee did not stop the Holocaust council from raising its moral voice until now.

The situation in Bosnia was highlighted in speeches at the opening of the museum in 1993, and in its first temporary exhibition.

The council also issued a statement about Rwanda, where tribal conflicts escalated into mass murders last year.

But those actions "didn't have the full effect that a more formal structure like the Committee on Conscience will have," said Hyman Bookbinder.

'Bureaucratic, technical' reasons caused delay

Bookbinder, the former Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee, served on the task force that drafted the proposal to form the conscience committee. He was a member of the original Holocaust Commission set up by President Carter.

The new committee will be appointed by the council chairman, but will include both members and non-members of the council.

Bookbinder attributed the delay in organizing the committee to "bureaucratic, technical" reasons.

Eighteen months ago, not long after the museum opened on The Mall in Washington in April 1993, the council appointed a task force to look into establishing a conscience committee.

The basic decision to establish a committee "was made very early on," said Ruth Mandel, who headed the task force and is vice chairwoman of the council.

"It is a confirmation of the museum as a living memorial and an institution that has relevance," she said of the committee.

The task force heard from representatives of human rights groups, and delved deeply into the history of the United Nations Genocide Treaty of 1951.

As recommended by the task force and approved by the council on June 14, the Committee on Conscience will operate under the definition of genocide used by the U.N. treaty.

That focus will be primarily on acts of genocide committed by governments either overtly or by aiding and abetting others in such acts.

In remarks to the June 14 meeting of the council,

Bookbinder noted the crucial role the former chairman of the Holocaust council, Elie Wiesel, had played in securing American ratification of the genocide treaty in 1986.

After Wiesel's testimony as the sole witness at a Senate hearing, treaty opponent Sen. Jesse Helms (R.-N.C.) let it be known that even though he would not vote for the treaty, he would no longer block it, according to Bookbinder.

The committee is expected to have a staff, charged with investigating reports of genocide.

"We do not plan to become a perennial fire hose that runs to every fire," said Lerman. "We do not plan to become a shadow State Department," making specific recommendations for action.

"We are above politics. We deal with morality only," he said.

"Will it be a very sensitive area? Yes. Will we be walking [through] minefields? Without any question." □

Palestinian prisoners launch hunger strike to obtain release

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 18 (JTA) — Palestinian security prisoners began a hunger strike Sunday, demanding their release from Israeli prisons.

Reports that Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat was joining the hunger strike to show solidarity with the prisoners were denied by Palestinian officials.

But Arafat called on Israel to release the prisoners. "We are asking for what has been agreed upon to be implemented," Arafat said.

"This issue has to be put at the top of the Israeli government's agenda."

About 6,000 prisoners are now held in jails in Israel and the West Bank.

Some 3,000 of them belong to the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement; about 2,500 belong to Al Fatah, the PLO's mainstream group; and the rest belong to smaller factions.

The hunger strike began at the Nablus jail in the West Bank and was expected to spread to other prisons.

Israel Television quoted Israel Prison Service officials as saying that only a few hundred of the prisoners were taking part in the strike.

Under the terms of the Cairo Agreement signed by Israel and the PLO in May 1994, Israel agreed to release some 5,000 of the 10,000 prisoners it held at the time. □

Jewish man stabbed near Old City

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 18 (JTA) — An Israeli Jew was stabbed in the back Sunday when an Arab attacked him near the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's Old City.

The man, who was not immediately identified, was lightly wounded but managed to walk to a police station in the Muslim Quarter, where he received first aid.

Police officials said this was the fifth stabbing of an Israeli in the Old City during the past two months.

No assailants have been apprehended.

Also Sunday, there were two shooting incidents near Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. No injuries were reported.

In further unrest, a 19-year-old yeshiva student was stabbed last Friday in the West Bank town of Hebron. He suffered moderate to serious injuries. Angry Jewish settlers, reacting to the attack, overturned carts belonging to Arabs in the central Hebron market before Israeli security officials stepped in to quell the crowds. □

Palestinian terrorist loses major fight to stay in Canada

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, June 18 (JTA) — A Palestinian terrorist who attacked an El Al jet in Athens and then lied about his criminal past to get into Canada has lost a major fight in his eight-year struggle to remain here.

A two-member panel of the Immigration and Refugee Board took more than two years to reach the June 9 ruling that the 52-year-old Mahmoud Mohammad Issa Mohammad is not eligible to remain in Canada as a refugee.

Mohammad, who has been living in Brantford, Ontario, one hour west of Toronto, will be deported soon — unless he successfully challenges the refugee board's decision in Federal Court.

Mohammad and an accomplice, Maher Suleiman, attacked and destroyed an El Al Boeing 707 jet on Dec. 26, 1968, in Athens, killing an Israeli passenger and wounding two flight attendants.

At his 1970 trial, Mohammad identified himself as a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Palestinian terrorist group.

He was found guilty on many counts, including willful manslaughter, arson and obstruction of air navigation.

He was sentenced to 17 years and five months. Suleiman got 14 years and three months.

Four months later, Palestinian terrorists hijacked an Olympic Airlines plane.

The terrorists threatened to blow the plane up — with all 55 passengers and the crew on board — unless the Greek authorities released seven prisoners, including Mohammad and Suleiman.

Errors allow Mohammad to slip into Canada

The Athens government capitulated, and Mohammad was released and sent to Lebanon.

Mohammad, along with his wife and three children, arrived in Canada as immigrants on Feb. 25, 1987.

He omitted his criminal record from his application, which he completed in 1986 at the Canadian Embassy in Madrid.

Due to errors on the part of Canadian intelligence and immigration officials, Canada granted him security clearance and a visa.

But after Mohammad's plane had already left Spain, Canadian intelligence agents in Ottawa issued an alert at Toronto's Pearson International Airport that said Mohammad was en route and was to be denied entry into the country.

However, a shift change took place before the flight arrived and the new workers were not informed of the alert, allowing Mohammad to slip into Canada.

In January 1988, a newspaper broke the story of his presence, causing a public uproar.

A month later, Mohammad attempted to flee Canada for an unspecified Arab country and was forced to return to Toronto.

An order for his deportation was issued in December 1988, after an immigration hearing concluded that he had hidden his criminal record when applying for permanent residence.

But Mohammad was allowed to stay — pending his request for refugee status.

Due to the backlog of cases, it took nearly four years for a preliminary hearing to take place.

At his preliminary hearing in November 1992, Mohammad was granted the full hearing for which the ruling was just made. □

Jews in Australia, Canada upset by delay in deportation hearing

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, June 18 (JTA) — In a move that has angered Jewish officials here and in Australia, Canadian officials have delayed for two months a deportation hearing for suspected Latvian war criminal Konrad Kalejs.

Kalejs, a Toronto resident and Australian citizen, will not be jailed as he waits for his Aug. 4 hearing before the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board.

"Granting him this delay without incarcerating him is tantamount to letting him escape," said Bernie Farber, spokesman for the Canadian Jewish Congress.

Immigration Department spokesman Roger White said the government has no reason to think that Kalejs would not show up for his August hearing.

In addition to the charges in Canada, Kalejs, 81, has been accused by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations of being a key officer in the notorious Aja's Kommando of the Latvian Security Police during World War II.

The Aja's Kommando, an SS auxiliary unit, was responsible for the deaths of 30,000 Latvian Jews.

Kalejs fled from the United States to Canada in 1984 after the U.S. Justice Department initiated deportation proceedings against him.

Meanwhile, the delay in Canada has prompted Australian Jewish leaders to call on their government to "seek alternate means" to deal with Nazi war criminals who also are citizens of Australia.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the roof body of the country's 100,000 Jews, is upset that Kalejs would be able to enter Australia's borders legally if deported from Canada and/or the United States.

Australia has "no option but to accept" Kalejs or any other passport holder, regardless of birthplace or reason for deportation, a government official recently said.

Isi Leibler, president of the Australian Jewish council, said Australia, by allowing Kalejs to return, would "once again be perceived to be a country which is not serious in its claims that Australia is anything but a haven for individuals who are deemed not worthy of residence in civilized nations."

Council officials also said: "If it is the case that Australia's existing legislation effectively allows a situation where an individual who is judged to have been involved in vile crimes can find refuge here, it is morally imperative for the government to seek alternate means of dealing with such people."

The council recently filed a statement with the minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Nick Bolkus, arguing that Australia's laws are inappropriate for dealing with war criminals whose specific involvement comes to light decades after the event. The council has been assured that Kalejs' status in Australia will be reviewed. □

(JTA correspondent Jeremy Jones in Sydney, Australia, contributed to this report.)

Newborn feathers her crib

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 18 (JTA) — One Israeli newborn has taken being "born with a silver spoon in her mouth" to heart.

A baby girl, born about three weeks ago at Meir Hospital in Kfar Saba, won about \$333,000 in the Mifal Hapayis lottery, Israel Radio reported. The lucky ticket was given to her by the hospital, which has a policy of buying three lottery tickets for each baby born there.

The happy family asked to remain anonymous. □