



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The United Nations rejected a request for Yasser Arafat to address its General Assembly as a head of state. The Palestine Liberation Organization had apparently hoped to gain nation-state status when the United Nations celebrates its 50th anniversary in the fall. [Page 2]

■ Congress is preparing to extend for 45 days legislation that would allow for continued U.S. financial assistance to the Palestine Liberation Organization. Lawmakers were looking for a legislative vehicle to pass the legislation before Congress recesses for the summer. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sharply criticized an ongoing settler campaign against the extension of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank. "I consider these efforts an attempt to tear the nation apart," Rabin said.

■ French authorities said they were unable to locate Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner in Argentina after they received tips that he had left his hideout in Syria. Brunner, believed by some to be already dead, orchestrated the deaths of some 128,000 Jews during World War II. [Page 4]

■ Israel Air Force planes launched a strike at bases belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Radio stations in Lebanon reported that Syria's defense minister was touring the area at the time of the air strike. [Page 2]

■ Polish prosecutors in Gdansk launched a probe into the reported sale of bars of soap said to have been manufactured by Germans from human flesh during World War II. The investigation began after a newspaper reported that two bars of the soap were up for sale at a local flea market.

■ Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat reportedly sold the exclusive rights to photos of his newborn daughter to SIPA Press, a Paris-based photo agency. The director of SIPA said 60 percent of all income from the photos would be donated to a Palestinian organization he would not identify.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Future of Israeli-Syrian accord appears to be increasingly grim

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prospects for an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement before next year's Israeli elections appear increasingly grim.

Voicing a downbeat assessment of the latest developments, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told his Cabinet this week that even the prospects of reaching an "interim agreement" before November 1996 are not good.

The prospects for reaching a permanent agreement with Damascus in the foreseeable future, Rabin implied, simply do not exist.

Rabin's statement to the Cabinet was widely interpreted here as his first attempt to confront Israeli public opinion with the reality of a faltering peace policy on the Syrian front.

Despite the Israeli government's declared readiness to make major territorial concessions — including its undeclared but heavily hinted readiness to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights — Syrian President Hafez Assad, for reasons of his own, is apparently not rushing into an accord.

As a result, Rabin, who intends to lead his Labor Party into next year's elections, will have to persuade the Israeli public that his readiness to make far-reaching concessions was neither a sign of weakness nor a waste of time.

He will also have to convince the electorate that he never forgot Israeli security needs during the years of on-again, off-again negotiations with Syria.

In addition, he will probably also make the point that his conciliatory policy of land-for-peace brought Israel tangible benefits in the international arena while enabling the Middle East peace process to proceed successfully on other fronts.

Too weak to take on Golan withdrawal

Some political observers say that if the prime minister can score these points with the Israeli electorate, he will hardly mourn Assad's refusal to reach an accord.

Given the deepening divide within Israel over the implementation of the next phase of the self-rule accord with the Palestinians, the Rabin government is arguably too weak to take on what would inevitably be a bitterly controversial withdrawal on the Golan Heights.

Last week, three renegade members of the Labor Party introduced a Golan bill that would have required a so-called "super-majority" of 70 of 120 Knesset voters — or a majority of all eligible voters in a referendum — to approve any withdrawal from the Golan.

Although the bill went down in a tie vote, the closeness of the vote dramatically demonstrated the extreme precariousness and vulnerability of the government's position on the Syrian issue.

Given this precariousness, political observers suggest that purely in terms of domestic politics and election strategy, the best thing for Rabin to do at this time would be to put the entire Israeli-Syrian peace process into a deep freeze.

Given Assad's stubborn refusal to return to the bargaining table, they add, Israel would clearly not be the party blamed — either in Washington or in Arab capitals — for the failure to move forward.

But the lack of progress with Syria would mean an ongoing and perhaps worsening mini-war in southern Lebanon.

Earlier this week, a 19-year-old Israeli soldier was killed when a missile launched by Hezbollah fundamentalists blew up an Israeli tank inside the security zone.

But in cynically political terms, the situation in Lebanon — going on now for almost two decades — is sustainable as long as the fighting remains relatively small-scale.

Rabin's sudden pessimism during Sunday's Cabinet session regarding the stalled talks with Syria may also have been intended — at American urging — to try to jolt the impassive Assad out of his stubborn lethargy and speed up the peace process.

As Rabin spoke, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his

Mideast team were engaged in intensive efforts in Washington to draw the two sides back to their negotiating table.

Christopher is reported to have fired off a stern missive to Assad over Syria's backing away from an earlier commitment to hold talks between top Syrian and Israeli military officers in Washington before the end of July.

The Syrians recently proclaimed their willingness to resume diplomatic talks at the ambassadorial level, but Rabin is insisting on a resumption of the military talks.

Further complicating the picture, Syria has also backed away from its stated willingness in mid-July to have early-warning stations on the Golan Heights after an Israeli withdrawal from the area, provided they were not staffed by Israeli personnel. This was seen at the time as a significant step forward — but it was soon followed by a sharp reversal of the Syrian stance.

American diplomats have been endlessly frustrated in their efforts to get the two sides back to the bargaining table. Plainly, the Clinton administration would still like to achieve a high-profile peacemaking success on the Israeli-Syrian front before American politicians, like their Israeli counterparts, get caught up in campaigning for next year's elections.

In the past, it was widely thought that Assad was earnestly interested in providing the Americans with such a success, and that this indeed was a key motive in his readiness to engage the Israelis across the negotiating table.

This no doubt remains the case to a certain degree. But the Republican-dominated Congress' unwillingness to dole out huge sums of foreign aid means that a peace deal with Israel would presumably be much less lucrative than Damascus had earlier anticipated.

As a result, although Damascus no longer has its longtime superpower backing from Moscow, Syria's Washington option may now look less attractive in Assad's eyes. □

U.N. to PLO: No go on Arafat appearing as a head of state

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States has successfully staved off a move to treat Yasser Arafat as a head of state when the United Nations celebrates its 50th anniversary in October.

Palestine Liberation Organization officials had apparently attempted to use the special sessions, slated for Oct. 22-24, to upgrade their status at the United Nations from observer mission to nation state.

"One of our concerns was that the PLO not use its participation in the anniversary to seek to change its status as an observer organization," said Robert Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs. The administration "did safeguard against that possibility," he told the House International Relations Committee on Wednesday.

The PLO observer at the United Nations had sought approval from the General Assembly to allow Arafat to speak as a head of state, but U.N. member states rejected the request, according to a spokesman for the Israeli mission to the United Nations.

"Chairman Arafat would not enjoy a coequal status as a head of state," Pelletreau said in Washington. "We have acted in a way that preserves the distinction, and the PLO will be in the category of an observer status."

As a result, Arafat, who drew the first day in the lottery that determined the speaking order for world leaders, will speak toward the end of the first day.

According to U.N. protocol, heads of state speak first, followed by vice presidents, crown princes or princesses and then heads of government.

Officials of observer states or organizations, such as Switzerland, the Vatican and the PLO, follow.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was not "as lucky" in his lottery drawing, according to the Israeli official, is slated to address the special session of the General Assembly on Oct. 24. □

Rabin raps Israeli settlers as protesters continue campaign

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jewish settlers continued a third straight day of protests in the West Bank hills on Wednesday as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called their campaign against an expected expansion of Palestinian self-rule an attempt to tear apart society.

At Givat Hadagan, a hillside located near the West Bank settlement of Efrat, police arrested more than 100 settlers who returned to the site to renew demonstrations that had taken place there the two previous days.

Similar protests took place Wednesday on hillsides near the West Bank settlements of Beit El and Kedumim.

Among those arrested was Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, a former New Yorker who serves as the spiritual leader of the Efrat community.

Several hundred demonstrators gathered outside the Russian Compound in Jerusalem on Wednesday night to protest his detention there along with other leaders of the protest. Israeli police, some of them on horseback, reportedly clashed with settlers who broke down barricades in an attempt to free Riskin.

About a dozen settlers were arrested.

In the Knesset, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin lashed out at the protesters, accusing them of causing a growing rift in Israeli society. He also attacked the settlers for drawing police and army troops away from other necessary duties.

"I consider these efforts an attempt to tear the nation apart," Rabin said, adding that the settlers represented "a small minority telling lies about giving up land that threatens the security of the people."

Settler leaders, meanwhile, complained that the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians were creating fear and anxiety over what their future would be.

Under the terms of the autonomy accord, no Jewish settlements will be dismantled during the interim stage of self-rule. The fate of the settlements are supposed to be determined during the so-called "final status" negotiations, slated to begin in 1996. □

Israeli planes strike Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel Air Force planes launched a strike Wednesday at bases belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Five members of the PFLP, which militantly rejects the Palestinian self-rule accord, were reportedly wounded in the raid.

The Israeli air strikes were the farthest north in Lebanon in a year. Radio stations in Lebanon reported that the Syrian defense minister, Moustafa Tlass, was touring the area at the time of the air strike.

Israeli commentators said the air strike was launched with the intention of delivering a message to Syria that its stalled peace negotiations with Israel should be resumed.

The fighting in Lebanon, much of which is Syrian-controlled, often reflects the state of Israeli-Syrian negotiations. □

JAFI program finds the way to aliyah is through the kids

By Uriel Masad

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With increased aliyah from the former Soviet Union still a major goal in Israel, one program of the Jewish Agency for Israel has successfully focused on Jewish youth as the driving force behind immigration.

The program, called "Na'aleh 16" — meaning "we will make aliyah" — brings youths between the ages of 15 and 17 from the former Soviet Union to Israel for a one- to three-year study program.

Launched two years ago as a joint effort of the Jewish Agency and government agencies that include the Prime Minister's Office, the project seeks to introduce students to their Jewish heritage and to life in Israel, with the hope that they will ultimately decide to remain.

So far, the program has proven highly successful, according to Yehiel Leket, head of the agency's Youth Aliyah Department, which runs the program.

An overwhelming majority of this year's graduates — 825 of 850 — have announced their intention to stay in Israel, Leket said.

And where the children go, the parents are not far behind: More than a quarter of the parents of Na'aleh graduates from the past two years have already immigrated to Israel.

Since its inception, the program has brought 3,700 young participants to study in 31 Youth Aliyah villages and at 25 kibbutzim throughout the country, according to agency officials. By the end of August, when the next group of participants arrive, that total will reach 5,000.

Along with its broader goal of introducing the students to life in Israel, the program seeks to have the youths obtain a high school diploma and learn Hebrew.

Of the 3,700 students who have taken part in the project, more than 300 are currently completing their pre-academic preparatory courses and are expected to enroll next year in one of Israel's schools of higher education.

Although the students learn Hebrew, some of their studies are conducted in Russian. They are also allowed to take some of their final exams in their mother tongue.

As part of their studies, the youths receive a comprehensive Jewish and Zionist education, which includes Jewish history, traditions and culture, along with tours of Israel. Along with their academic studies, the youths are encouraged to meet their Israeli counterparts, an encounter that exposes them to the different facets of Israeli society and to its multitude of lifestyles.

As it marks the program's second anniversary, the Jewish Agency has arranged to bring some 1,000 parents of the program's participants to visit their children in Israel next week.

Uri Gordon, head of the agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, which organized the visit, said the weeklong trip will include tours of Israel.

The parents — arriving on 18 flights from 17 different locations in the former Soviet Union — are also scheduled to attend a special employment and absorption information fair, where they will have the chance to explore the opportunities awaiting them if they, too, decide to make aliyah. □

French police fail in effort to locate Brunner in Argentina

NEW YORK (JTA) — French police have failed to locate Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner in Argentina after receiving tips that he left his hideout in Syria.

The head of the manhunt section of the Paris

police, Gerard Bronne, told a French television station that members of his unit had traveled to northern Argentina last month.

The trip was an effort to follow up on information from Uruguay that Brunner had settled in Argentina along with other Nazi war criminals wanted by Interpol, the international police agency.

"He's not there," said Bronne, adding, "At least we didn't find him."

Brunner served during World War II as personal secretary to Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's chief aide.

The person whom Eichmann once described as his "best man" orchestrated the deaths of some 128,000 Jews from Austria, Greece, France and Slovakia during the war years.

Brunner was listed earlier this year in the German newsmagazine Focus as one of Interpol's 12 most-wanted people.

According to the magazine, which quoted information from the Interpol center in Lyon, France, the former SS officer who was previously believed to be living undisturbed in Damascus, Syria, had obtained an Austrian passport under an assumed name and moved to Argentina.

As far back as 1992, diplomats in Syria maintained that Brunner was dead.

A similar assessment was made by French lawyer and Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld.

If Brunner is alive, he would be 83. □

Danish police nab two men suspected of planning attacks

By Avi V. Stieglitz

NEW YORK (JTA) — Danish police have indicted two men suspected of planning terrorist activities against Jewish and Israeli targets in Copenhagen.

Mohammed Fahim and Abdul Hakim Suliman, both Egyptian nationals, were charged last month with buying chemicals and other items with the intention to carry out bomb attacks, Danish officials said.

The Israeli Embassy, Jewish cemeteries and train stations were listed as targets on maps found in the men's possession at the time of their arrests, the Danish officials said.

They were also reportedly carrying U.S. telephone numbers that have been linked to the Egyptian fundamentalist group Jama Al Islamia.

"These are dangerous times for Jewish communities, unfortunately, and we must remain vigilant," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

However, the Jewish community in Copenhagen denies that any Jewish cemeteries were being targeted, Steinberg said.

The Danish news agency reported that the telephone numbers and group ties point to a connection with the conspirators of the World Trade Center bombing in New York.

The FBI is currently working with Danish security officials because the suspects' fingerprints match some of those found on equipment used in the World Trade Center bombing, said Jorgen Grunet, the spokesman at the Danish Embassy in Washington.

The two suspects, who were in Denmark legally at the time of their arrest, had previously been arrested there on charges of arson.

The case was dropped for lack of evidence, according to officials.

Danish officials said the case would probably not go before a judge until early next year because of a heavy backlog, according to Danish news reports. □

Once again, Congress to renew legislation enabling aid to PLO*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For the second time in as many months, Congress is preparing to extend for 45 days legislation that allows U.S. financial assistance to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

As Congress prepares for its summer recess, lawmakers are running out of time to consider a new version of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act.

The measure, first passed after the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO in 1993, waives previous laws that prevent U.S. contact with — and assistance to — the PLO.

Without another extension before Aug. 15, U.S. diplomats could not meet with Palestinian Authority officials, the PLO office in Washington would have to close and no U.S. money could flow to the self-rule areas of Gaza and Jericho.

Against this backdrop, all eyes were initially focused this week on the State Department Authorization Bill in the Senate as the vehicle for the legislation.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who had introduced a new version of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act along with Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), included the measure as an amendment to the broader legislation being debated on Monday.

However, by Tuesday, Helms was forced to pull the entire legislation off the floor when Republicans could not muster support for a technical vote that would cut off debate on the authorization bill.

Most Democrats objected to provisions in the legislation that would fold three foreign-policy agencies, including the Agency for International Development, into the State Department.

The Helms measure, which tightens some provisions of previous legislation regarding aid to the PLO but essentially enables continued aid, drew widespread support in the Jewish community.

Calls for covenant change

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations this week announced a "strong consensus" among its 50 national agencies to support the legislation.

"We believe that this version strengthens the compliance provision of the original legislation that set the requirements for U.S. funding to the Palestinian Authority," Leon Levy, chairman, and Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman, said in a statement.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, also supports the Helms bill, which gives the PLO until after Palestinian elections to change its national covenant calling for the destruction of Israel.

A few groups, including the Zionist Organization of America, however, have called for tougher legislation.

But both opponents and proponents of aid to the PLO are supporting the 45-day extension, which the House was expected to vote on before it adjourns Friday and the Senate was expected to act on by next week.

Because the fate of the State Department Authorization Bill was uncertain, members of Congress were expected to find another vehicle to approve the legislation.

Robert Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs, strongly urged Congress to approve a short-term extension of the legislation.

"A lapse of authority under the act would be especially detrimental at this critical time," Pelletreau told the House International Relations Committee on Wednesday. □

Der Spiegel: German official aided in capture of Eichmann*By Gil Sedan*

BONN (JTA) — A senior German justice official was a key figure in the abduction of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1960, the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* reported this week.

Fritz Bauer, the general prosecutor at the time, provided an agent of the Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, with information needed for the capture, according to the magazine.

Bauer reportedly had left the doors open to his Frankfurt office, which allowed the Israeli agent, Michael Maor, to enter after office hours.

Maor had instructions to take photos of a file that was lying on the left side of Bauer's desk. Only after he had developed the film did Maor realize that it was the Adolf Eichmann file.

A few weeks later, Eichmann was kidnapped by Israeli agents near Buenos Aires. He was executed in 1962, after a lengthy and emotional trial in Jerusalem.

Bauer reportedly contacted the Israelis at his own initiative to give them the whereabouts of Eichmann, which were, according to the magazine, unknown to the Israelis until that point in time.

Five years after the secret mission in Frankfurt, Maor met Bauer in Israel. "We reached hands for each other in a friendly manner, but we uttered no word about that affair," Maor reportedly said. □

Israel may take a chance on legalization of casinos*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's first legal casino could be operating within a year and a half, Tourism Minister Uzi Baram said this week.

His comments Monday came in the wake of a recent crackdown by police on illegal gambling houses.

A special committee headed by Moshe Gavish of the Discount Mercantile Bank is scheduled to prepare legislation on the legalization of gambling. The committee also is to determine where the casinos would be set up and who would run them.

The issue has sparked heated debate in the past, but is being viewed differently as a result of the developing peace economy.

Israeli tourism industry officials said they are concerned that visits to Israeli resorts would dwindle if a gambling ban continued.

Another Cabinet minister in favor of legalizing gambling is Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein.

He argued that if people are going to gamble, they might as well do it under proper supervision. "There is no use in proscribing behavior which is quite common in Israel, within Israeli casinos and abroad," he told Israel Radio. "It is futile to combat this through prohibition.

He said the casinos would probably be established in a limited area, probably Eilat.

However, the head of the anti-casino lobby in Eilat, Uzi Avneri, told Israel Radio that legalized gambling would have detrimental effects on the local tourism industry. Avneri said legalized gambling would raise crime rates in the city.

A public opinion poll for the Tourism Ministry found that 60 percent of those surveyed supported legalizing casinos.

The manager of the casino in Taba, Egypt, just over the Israeli border, told Israel Radio that 500 to 600 Israelis visit the establishment weekly. □