



NEWS AT A GLANCE

NEWS ANALYSIS

Intensity of Israeli-PLO talks mirrors campaign of protests

By David Landau

■ Right-wing demonstrators blocked major roads and intersections throughout Israel in what was the latest protest against any extension of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank. Several dozen demonstrators were arrested when police stopped them from blocking evening rush-hour traffic. [Page 3]

■ An Israeli Jew was charged in Jerusalem District Court with spying for Iran. Charged with spying for an enemy country and endangering national security, the man was reportedly arrested two months ago but the story was suppressed by Israeli authorities. [Page 2]

■ Israeli Interior Minister Ehud Barak became a member of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's Inner Cabinet. Barak, who retired earlier this year as the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, became the 10th Cabinet minister to join the body, which oversees Israel's peace negotiations.

■ Israel Aircraft Industries formed a joint venture with American and Israeli firms to develop commercially viable products in a wide range of fields. IAI will bring its technological know-how to the new venture, called Integrated Technology Israel, while marketing responsibilities will be left to its partners.

■ The Jewish cemetery in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius was desecrated by anti-Semitic vandals, the World Jewish Congress reported. It was the third such incident in Lithuania this year.

■ The head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations stirred controversy within the umbrella body by calling for the establishment of a new committee to monitor anti-Israel speeches made by Palestinian leaders. The proposal came as a videotape of a recent speech by Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat calling for a jihad is being circulated among Jewish groups.

■ An exhibit devoted to Anne Frank will open in Hiroshima next week. The exhibit comes two months after the opening of the first Holocaust museum in Japan. [Page 4]

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was no coincidence that Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were intensifying their efforts to reach a new accord this week as Israeli right-wing activists were stepping up their campaign of civil disobedience.

Both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian talks are acutely aware that the longer it takes to reach an agreement, the more time the Jewish settlers and their political supporters have to thwart it.

While demonstrators have been engaging in high-profile protests against government policies, there is no clear consensus among the Israeli public regarding the peace process or, for that matter, the actions of the settlers.

Palestinian opposition, too, has more opportunity to disrupt the process the longer it takes to reach the long-elusive agreement for extending Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

If further acts of Palestinian terrorism occur during this period of uncertainty and dangerous political tension, the position of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government will grow steadily weaker — and with it the ability to negotiate.

This common awareness of the precariousness of the current situation threw a shadow over the Peres-Arafat meetings, which were held early this week in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba, site of a series of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations last year.

"We, too, have our opposition," Arafat spokesman Marwan Kanafani said during a break in the talks. "Some of our people, too, even within the Palestinian Authority, are dissatisfied with the way the peace process is going."

But Kanafani maintained that violent opposition to the self-rule accord among Palestinian fundamentalists in the Gaza Strip and West Bank has largely been quelled by Palestinian security forces.

And he said Israeli authorities should adopt a similar course if and when the Israeli opposition turns violent.

Kanafani said the key area of discord in the ongoing negotiations is the issue of security — a point later confirmed by Peres himself.

Nonetheless, after meeting with Arafat for five hours Monday, Peres told the Cabinet that "some progress" had been made in the talks.

Several deadlines missed

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the two sides have set Sept. 13 as a new target date for completing their negotiations.

Earlier this week, Peres said that even though differences remain between the two sides, the main body of the agreement has already been written.

But Israel and the Palestinians have already missed several summer deadlines for concluding the second-phase agreement.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators meeting in Eilat have already reached broad agreement for an Israeli army withdrawal from six Palestinian population centers in the West Bank prior to the holding of Palestinian elections.

Israel balked, however, at withdrawing its troops from West Bank Arab villages located near Jewish settlements before the elections.

Peres told Cabinet ministers that he and Arafat had agreed that this second phase of an Israel Defense Force pullback from the villages would take place over the course of 18 months after elections in the territories.

Despite the agreements reached in Taba, there are still a number of other thorny issues in dispute:

- Water rights: The Palestinians are demanding control over subterranean water sources in the West Bank immediately; Israel wants this issue deferred until next year's so-called "permanent status" talks.

- Election procedures: Israel is insisting that any granting of voting rights to Palestinians residing in eastern Jerusalem not have any effect on its claims to full sovereignty over the city. The two sides are also deadlocked

over the size of the Palestinian Council that is to be elected.

A highly placed Palestinian official told Israeli reporters in Taba that these ongoing disputes would require a meeting between Arafat and Rabin, "since we know that Rabin calls the shots in Israel, not Peres."

As the Israeli-Palestinian talks intensified, the Rabin government was forced to contend with escalating public unrest among Israelis concerned about the outcome of those talks.

Rabin met with settler leaders at the end of last week and secured a three-day Tisha B'Av "cease-fire" in the four days of often stormy demonstrations the settlers launched last week on West Bank hilltops to protest any handover of West Bank lands to the Palestinians.

But on Sunday night, immediately after the truce ended, settlers and their supporters took over two more hilltops in the Jerusalem area — only to have their demonstrations ended the next day by Israeli troops.

The depth of support for settlers was directly tested when the settlers group Zo Artzeinu, or "This is Our Land," called for demonstrations of mass civil disobedience throughout Israel on Tuesday.

Although the turnout was not as large as organizers had apparently hoped for, the thousands of demonstrators who did converge at major thoroughfares succeeded in disrupting rush-hour traffic at crossroads throughout the country.

After the demonstrations, settler leaders emerged from yet another meeting with Rabin disappointed and angry that the prime minister had rejected their demands for a national referendum before implementing the next phase of the self-rule agreement.

Support difficult to gauge

They vowed that they would not meet with Rabin again and said the failed encounter was reason enough for them to continue their campaign of civil disobedience.

Tiny groups of settlers then proceeded to set up five or six new settlements in the West Bank Tuesday night as a symbolic act of defiance.

The extent of support for such activities, though difficult to gauge at this point, is a key factor in the unfolding political drama.

Polls published last week gave conflicting signals regarding Israeli attitudes toward the settlers campaign of civil disobedience.

A poll conducted by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv showed that 54 percent of 500 respondents disagreed with the actions taken last week by Israeli security forces when they forcibly removed the settlers from the West Bank hilltops.

A survey in Yediot Achronot gave the opposite result: 75 percent of 501 respondents opposed last week's protests by the settlers.

And this week, Ha'aretz weighed in with another poll indicating that 54.4 percent of the Israeli public supports the peace process.

Rabbi Benny Elon, a leader of Zo Artzeinu, said this week that the campaign depended for its ultimate success on the staying power of the activists and their supporters.

They hope that if they maintain a high profile, they can attract even more Israelis to their cause.

For its part, the government is walking a fine line. Although pledging to crack down on the civil disobedience, too much force could be counterproductive for the government's own cause.

Meanwhile, the protesters are reaching out for support in the United States.

Supporter of the settlers demonstrated outside

Israeli consulates across the United States over the weekend.

And on Tuesday, Yechiel Leiter, executive director of the Yesha Council, said his council, which represents settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, plans to establish an "emergency relief fund" in the United States and Canada for the West Bank settlers.

In a teleconference with members of the Jewish media on Tuesday, Leiter said the fund would defray the financial expenses of settlers who have taken time off from work to demonstrate, as well as pay for the legal defense of settlers who have been arrested. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem and JTA editorial assistant Lori Silberman in New York contributed to this report.)

Israeli Jew charged with spying for Iran

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court has charged an Israeli Jew with spying for Iran.

The Jerusalem District Court charged Herzl Rad, 31, with spying for an enemy country, endangering national security and having contact with foreign agents.

Rad, a clothing merchant in Jerusalem, was arrested two months ago and has been in detention since then, according to local reports.

But publication of the arrest was censored until this week, when the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security agency, dropped its opposition to release of the story.

News that an Israeli citizen had been charged with spying for an Islamic country first appeared in the London-based Arabic paper Al-Wasat.

Security officials in Israel denied the paper's report that Rad had been kidnapped by Mossad officials in Istanbul and flown back to Israel to face charges.

According to Israeli media reports, Rad was arrested in Israel two months ago. The reports also said Rad, who was born in Iran, had contacted the Iranian Consulate in Istanbul one year ago after going into debt, offering information in exchange for money.

After being questioned by Iranian officials in Istanbul in April, he was reportedly flown to Tehran, where he was subsequently recruited.

Rad's mission was to enter Israel Defense Force bases and obtain information, Israel Television reported. In return, he would receive \$10,000 that was to be deposited into a German bank account.

Rad, who has denied all charges against him, maintained that he had been tortured by the Iranians and forced into being a spy.

"He was kidnapped by Iranian officials," Rad's lawyer told Israel Television.

"He came to Israel security services to tell them of the torture he had undergone, and instead they arrested him with these trumped-up charges." □

Israeli defense plant to lay off 650 workers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Faced with continuing financial losses, Rafael Defense Industries, one of Israel's major defense contractors, will lay off some 650 of its employees.

The layoffs were announced after Israeli Finance Minister Avraham Shohat said negotiations with the workers councils had gone nowhere. According to initial speculation, some 1,200 people at the state-owned firm, which has 4,500 employees, were to be let go. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Reaching into heart of cities, Israeli protesters snarl traffic

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Evening rush-hour took on nightmarish proportions for Israeli drivers Tuesday when thousands of right-wing demonstrators blocked roads throughout the country.

The demonstrations — coordinated by a grass-roots settlers group called Zo Artzeinu, or “This Is Our Land” — clogged major arteries in Israel from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., the height of rush-hour traffic.

Although the turnout was lower in many places than the organizers had hoped, the high-profile campaign, which received much publicity in the Israeli media, was seen as a success as it snarled traffic at crossroads in the north and in the south.

In the Negev, traffic was tied up at one intersection for nearly an hour.

“We need to show that this country is almost out of control,” said Akiva Paz, a 19-year-old yeshiva student watching the scuffles from the sidewalk here.

“Thousands of people are against the peace process, and they are all out demonstrating.”

The protests came as Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat held a second day of talks in an effort to bridge differences that remain on key issues in the ongoing negotiations for extending Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

They also came in the wake of four straight days of often stormy protests last week on several West Bank hilltops by settlers opposed to any ceding of West Bank lands to the Palestinians.

In Jerusalem on Tuesday, hundreds of protesters, virtually all of them religious Jerusalemites, tried to block Sha’ar Hagai, a busy intersection at the entrance to the city.

Carrying placards denouncing Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as a traitor, the demonstrators stood or sat in front of cars entering and leaving the capital. Most appeared to be teen-agers or young adults.

Unlike some of last week’s demonstrations in the territories, most of the Jerusalem protesters kept very young children at home.

Honks in approval, irritation

Clearly prepared for skirmishes, Jerusalem police stationed dozens of officers, some on horseback, around the protesters in an attempt to keep them on the sidelines.

But their tactics proved unsuccessful, as dozens of demonstrators crossed the intersection, stopping traffic for a minute or two.

Drivers sympathetic to the cause honked their horns in approval; irritated commuters also gave loud honks to show their annoyance.

Just as the police seemed to be losing ground, more than 100 border police armed with M-16 rifles and billy clubs circled the crowd. This time, when protesters tried to stop traffic, three or four officers converged, dragging them away.

At least two dozen protesters, most shouting and kicking, were placed in a police wagon and arrested in Jerusalem. Scores of others were arrested elsewhere.

Binyamin Rockover, one of the few demonstrators with infants in tow, defied a police call to remove his 3-month-old daughter from the scene.

“I don’t think this is dangerous. It will be more dangerous if Rabin carries out his plans,” he said.

“We’re giving away Eretz Yisrael,” said Elisha

Ben-Haim, 44. “Perhaps now Rabin will understand that something is wrong. He’s giving our homeland away to terrorists.”

This opinion was echoed by 25-year-old Tamar Lehavi, one of the few secular Jews at the demonstration.

“It feels as if our country is being given away,” she said. “The peace process is like a runaway train, and I can’t see the line where it will stop.”

Lehavi stressed that “many secular Israelis support the settlers. The religious population is more organized, so they’re more visible. But I know many others who sympathize with their position.”

While the turnout for Tuesday’s demonstrations in Jerusalem was measured in the hundreds, the main demonstration site in northern Tel Aviv — at the Arlozorov Street and Haifa Road intersection — drew just 100.

At times, the protesters there were outnumbered by the surrounding journalists, photographers, and radio and television crews who had gathered to cover the event.

Chaim Lanton, a Tel Aviv resident and one of the protest’s organizers, said he expected at least 1,000 demonstrators. Lanton was quick to point out that at least half of those who showed up were secular Israelis.

Among the demonstrators was Rivka Vachtman, 65, of Tel Aviv, who lost eight family members in Israeli-Arab wars.

“I fought in ’48, in the War of Independence. I accompanied the convoys to the besieged Jerusalem. And I came to protest this government’s policies,” she said.

“Rabin is Arafat’s Dog” said a poster depicting a dog with the head of Rabin.

“Death to the Arabs,” some young demonstrators chanted.

Others blew whistles. One of them wore a Zo Artzeinu T-shirt depicting a map of “Greater Israel” that included Jordan.

On the front of the T-shirt read the words: “I don’t mind getting arrested for our land.”

Yakov Finkelstein, a 78-year-old self-described peacenik, came from Holon, south of Tel Aviv, to watch the demonstration.

“It hurts me that the left is not out here to confront them,” he said. “Where is Peace Now? Where are the workers movements? This is how fascism started in Germany.”

But Ze’ev Kraoz, 68, of Ramat Gan was deeply disappointed with the turnout.

“If I were a Tel Avivi, I’d be ashamed. I am ashamed as a Ramat Gani. People are just apathetic. They’re with us, really. But they’re apathetic,” he said.

“It’s just like the Jews before the Holocaust,” he added. “They all think it won’t happen to them. But they’ll still come out. Wait and see.” □

(JTA correspondent Uriel Masad in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

Yet again, trees fall victim to blaze

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Several dozen acres of woodland in the Jerusalem hills were destroyed in a fire Monday, said officials, who believe that the cause was arson.

The fire occurred near the Sha’ar Hagai interchange in the Jerusalem corridor, not far from the site of a massive blaze last month that destroyed millions of trees.

Firefighters, aided by helicopters, got the blaze under control.

An initial inquiry showed that the fire had started in three separate places, which indicates arson, Israel Television reported. □

Presidents Conference leaders divided over monitoring Arafat

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The chairman and top paid professional of the Jewish community's primary umbrella group are at odds over a proposal to monitor anti-Israel speeches by Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian officials.

With a videotape of Arafat calling for a "jihad via deaths, via battles" circulating among Jewish groups, Leon Levy, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, has proposed forming a new committee to "report and monitor" such speeches.

But Malcolm Hoenlein, the conference's executive vice chairman, said, "There is no need for a committee."

Hoenlein prefers that the entire conference take up the matter.

The latest question of PLO compliance with the accords it signed with Israel comes as Jewish groups opposed to American aid to the Palestinian Authority are disseminating excerpts of a June 19 speech by Arafat at Gaza's Al-Azar University.

"The commitment still stands, and the oath is still valid: that we will continue this long jihad, this difficult jihad, this blossoming jihad, via deaths, via battles, but this is the way of victory, the first way, not only for the Palestinian nation, but also for our Arab and Islamic nation," said Arafat, according to a videotape and transcript of the speech circulated by the Zionist Organization of America.

The question of whether to convene a special committee to monitor such speeches came during a telephone meeting of Conference of Presidents member agencies Monday.

Levy said he mentioned the idea "off the cuff" at the beginning of a call that included a peace process briefing by Israel's ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich. The conference asked Rabinovich for additional information on the Arafat speech. Another conference call was planned for later in the week to discuss the matter further.

"It disturbed me that information is coming to us now on a speech taped two months ago," Levy said in a telephone interview after the call. "Why should we be discussing this now and not two months ago?"

'Conference not equipped for this'

With this in mind, Levy suggested the formation of the committee.

"When speeches are made by members of the Palestinian Authority contrary to the Oslo Accords and other agreements and it is not known by the conference, I think it is important to get it to them," Levy said.

Levy said he planned to discuss the idea with past conference chairmen. "I'm sure they'll be all for it," he added.

Hoenlein said he did not discuss the idea with Levy after Monday's conference call.

"It was dead as far as I was concerned," Hoenlein said. "However, this is [Levy's] prerogative as chairman," he added.

As for conference members, at least one organization is opposed to the idea.

"If we want additional information all we have to do is ask for it," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

The conference is "not equipped for this and that's not what we're about," Foxman said, adding, "Certainly, we can ask the Israeli government to provide us with any information we need."

Other conference members, however, backed the idea.

Both the pro-peace process Americans for Peace Now and one of its loudest critics, the Zionist Organization of America, have embraced the idea, albeit for different reasons.

The proposed committee would "fill the need for analysis on this issue," said Gary Rubin, executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

"It makes a lot of sense for the Presidents Conference to enter a serious deliberative process. There is simply not enough information out there to make any conclusions," he said, referring to Arafat's recent speech.

ZOA President Morton Klein said he wants to use the committee as a platform to prove his charge that Arafat is not complying with the accords he signed with Israel.

"This committee will acknowledge the fact that Arafat makes these outrageous speeches and will expose past and any future speeches inciting terrorism," Klein said. □

Holocaust education spreads in Japan with new exhibitions

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Fifty years after atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan is remembering not only Japanese victims of the war, but Jewish victims as well.

An exhibit on Anne Frank will open in Hiroshima next week, two months after the opening of the first Holocaust museum in Japan.

Although the Holocaust and the dropping of the atomic bomb are separate phenomena, they are "nonetheless two watershed events that emerged from the second world war," Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

"It is an appropriate time for the world to pause and remember the innocent," he added.

Cooper, who has been working toward educating the Japanese about the Holocaust and the Jews, will be in Japan next week for the opening of an exhibition about Anne Frank and the Holocaust.

The exhibit is in Japanese.

Anne Frank's diary is popular among the Japanese, the rabbi said, adding that one goal of the Wiesenthal center exhibit is to show the connection between Anne's experience and the experience of the Jewish people.

The exhibit is to take place in Hiroshima's peace park, which is devoted to the victims of the atomic bomb.

The Holocaust museum, dedicated to the memory of the 1.5 million children who perished in the Holocaust, officially opened in June in Fukuyama, a city near Hiroshima.

The museum is believed to be the first of its kind in Japan.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem helped establish the new museum, which displays 70 objects on three floors, including original artifacts from the concentration camps.

A statement from Yad Vashem said the museum was initiated by Mekuto Uzuka, head of the Myoki Protestant Church in Hiroshima.

At the opening ceremony for the museum, concern was expressed about anti-Semitism in Japan, which has a thriving cottage industry in anti-Semitic books and articles.

Japan, which has a population of 120 million, is home to about 2,000 Jews. □

(JTA correspondents Henriette Boas in Amsterdam and Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)