



NEWS AT A GLANCE

NEWS ANALYSIS

Political tensions escalate in wake of Israeli-PLO accord

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ominous talk of a “rift in the nation” and even “civil war” is becoming commonplace as political tensions reach a new high here.

The escalating tensions were sparked by the preliminary agreement signed last week by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat for extending Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank.

The agreement was approved this week by both the Israeli Cabinet and the PLO Executive Committee — though not without opposition in both bodies.

In addition, there are reported tensions between the political and military establishments over some of the details of the agreement, which is known as the interim agreement on self-rule.

Meanwhile, across the scrub-covered hillsides of the West Bank, Jewish settlers are continuing to create symbolic settlements to demonstrate their dogged opposition to any ceding of the land to the Palestinians.

In at least one case this week, the confrontations turned deadly, when settlers opened fire on a group of Palestinian protesters.

Four settlers were arrested in connection with the shooting near the Jewish settlement of Beit El.

The deepening controversy surrounding the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians is also threatening Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s parliamentary majority.

Rabin may have thought that he would have some respite from parliamentary squabbles when the Knesset went on summer recess earlier this month.

But the relief was temporary, because the opposition, led by the Likud Party, called the Knesset into special session Tuesday to consider a series of motions attacking the Peres-Arafat accord.

At a stormy session, Rabin rejected opposition demands that he submit last week’s Israeli-PLO agreement for Knesset approval.

Rabin is insisting that because the accord has not yet been finalized, he does not need to submit it for Knesset approval at this point.

Eroding Cabinet and army support

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resumed their discussions in Eilat this week and, according to Israeli officials, a final agreement will be hammered out within three weeks.

An official signing ceremony is slated to take place in Washington on or about Sept. 6.

Rabin pledged to seek the legislators’ stamp of approval — a move required by custom, though not by Israeli law — once the negotiations are concluded and the agreement completed.

With two Knesset members belonging to Rabin’s own Labor Party — Avigdor Kahalani and Emanuel Zismann — pledging not to support the government on the accord, Rabin’s majority will depend on the tiny Yi’ud Party and/or on the tacit cooperation of the fervently religious Shas Party.

Two of Yi’ud’s three members are expected to back the government.

But Rabin’s list of troubles involves more than just the settlers, the parliamentary opposition and defections from within his own party.

His Cabinet itself showed some erosion at its weekly meeting Sunday. Equally significant were leaked reports of criticism from within the army.

Energy Minister Gonen Segev opposed the accord outright. Two other Cabinet members — recently appointed Interior Minister Ehud Barak and Religious Affairs Minister Shimon Shetreet — abstained.

Segev later said that he feared that the new agreement would lead to an Israeli withdrawal to its pre-1967 borders.

Barak, who retired in January as Israel Defense Force chief of staff, reportedly spoke for his former comrades in the IDF high command in addressing some security considerations.

Barak warned his new Cabinet colleagues that the terms of the

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin rejected demands by the opposition to seek full Knesset approval for the preliminary agreement on extending Palestinian self-rule. Meanwhile, the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization approved the preliminary agreement reached last week between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Although there was reportedly no opposition expressed at the meeting in Tunis, nearly half of the 18-member body did not attend. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin announced that security forces would no longer forcibly remove settlers camping out on West Bank hillsides to protest the peace process. But Rabin said he would not permit the settlers to build any permanent structures at the sites of their demonstrations. [Page 4]

■ Israeli officials agreed to allow American planes fly over Israel in the event of an Iraqi attack against Jordan. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expressed doubts that the developments surrounding the defections of two high-level Iraqi officials would pose an immediate threat to Israel. [Page 4]

■ A group of more than 140 Palestinian police officers arrived in the Gaza Strip from Algeria. They are scheduled to join a contingent of 12,000 Palestinian police officers who will patrol in the West Bank when Palestinian self-rule is extended to the area. [Page 2]

■ Israeli children are among the poorest in Western industrialized countries, a new study said. The findings found that the poorest of the poor children were in Ireland, followed by Israel and the United States. But the gap between after-tax household incomes of poor and rich children in Israel was among the smallest of the Western nations. [Page 3]

■ Israel’s cost of living index rose by only two-tenths of a percent in July, with inflation rising by 2.8 percent since the beginning of the year. Manufacturers and industrialists called on the Bank of Israel to respond with an appropriate drop in interest rates.

evolving interim agreement with the Palestinians could harm Israel's ability to negotiate freely when the so-called "permanent status" negotiations with the Palestinians are held.

The Peres-Arafat agreement calls, in part, for an IDF redeployment in the West Bank in three stages by July 1997. But the permanent status talks are scheduled to begin in May 1996 — a situation, Barak warned, that could weaken Israel's bargaining position in those future crucial negotiations.

Rabin was reportedly irked by Barak's position at the Cabinet session. Indeed, Rabin said all ministers opposing the evolving accord could submit their resignations.

But the personal ties between Rabin and Barak are close, and observers predict that they will not be frayed by this first friction between them.

On Monday, Rabin sent Barak to defend the government's position before the Chief Rabbinate Council, which is under pressure from the settlers to issue a rabbinic edict against the accord with the Palestinians.

Rabin, meanwhile, also faced criticism from top-level officers in the IDF.

Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, commander of the IDF's central command — which includes the West Bank — was reported over the weekend to be harboring serious doubts about his units' ability to provide the requisite protection for Jewish settlers under the terms of the evolving agreement.

Right-wing divisions

Rabin, in turn, countered that the ultimate responsibility for the accord rested with elected civilian officials. The army, he added, was required to provide the best solutions available within the terms of reference set by the government.

As Rabin squares off against opponents from all sides, the Israeli right-wing is hardly unified.

On Monday, opposition parties in the Knesset met with leaders of Gush Emunim, the Third Way, Professors for Political Strength and other conservative extra-parliamentary groups to discuss tactics to oppose the Peres-Arafat accord.

But there have been severe rifts within the Israeli right after the hard-line settler group Zo Artzeinu, or "This is Our Land," launched a countrywide protest last week, creating roadblocks that stranded evening rush-hour drivers for up to two hours.

Likud Knesset member Binyamin Begin condemned the action outright, while other Likud parliamentarians voiced their own reservations.

Even the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, dissociated itself from the roadblocks — even though it continues to collaborate with Zo Artzeinu in the ongoing hillside demonstrations throughout the West Bank.

Some of the participants at the Monday meeting of the opposition proposed launching a "siege" of the Knesset and the government complex in Jerusalem — a move designed to paralyze the Rabin government.

But this idea was met by strong opposition.

Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu vigorously discouraged such tactics, insisting that the opposition's fight against the government's peace policy must be conducted wholly within the law.

At Tuesday's Knesset session, the Likud leader called for a national referendum on the agreement, asserting that Rabin has reneged on all his campaign promises and that he was not acting in accordance with the platform on which he had been elected.

Netanyahu put forward his own proposal, which

would grant Palestinians "administrative independence" in the West Bank, but leave ultimate authority over the land, water and security in the hands of Israel.

Peres responded that the Rabin government's basic stance in the negotiations with the Palestinians had been established by a Likud government in the Camp David Accords that led up to the signing of the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace accord.

Peres said the Camp David Accords first set down the idea of an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian population centers and the establishment of a Palestinian police force — ideas Peres described as having the Likud's own "patent." □

Hadassah delegates witness political protests first-hand

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Delegates to Hadassah's annual convention in Israel got a first-hand glimpse of current tensions on the Israeli political scene this week when a key conference event was disrupted by right-wing protesters.

The conference's 2,000 delegates and guests were assembled at the Binyanei Ha'uma convention center in the capital Sunday night to honor Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres with the Henrietta Szold Award, Hadassah's highest honor.

But the premier's speech was marred by heckling, as was that of U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk.

The protesters included settlers from Gush Etzion, led by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin of Efrat, and members of the Women in Green Israeli nationalist movement. Some of them lay across the plaza outside the hall, while others dodged security guards to take up seats in the audience. Several of the hecklers were ousted bodily by security men.

Riskin said such protests were planned for all future public events where the prime minister appears. □

Police arrive from Algeria

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group of more than 140 Palestinian police officers have arrived in the Gaza Strip from Algeria.

They are scheduled to join a contingent of 12,000 Palestinian police officers who will be on patrol in the West Bank when Palestinian self-rule is extended in the area.

Israel Radio reported that two members of the newly arrived police force were stopped by Israel for security reasons.

Meanwhile, Israel extended its closure of Gaza from Wednesday to Thursday.

The closure was imposed last week, and extended several times, amid reports that a terror attack was being planned to thwart the still-evolving agreement to extend Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank. □

Bomb explodes near joint patrol

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli was lightly hurt Sunday, when a roadside bomb exploded near a joint Israeli-Palestinian patrol near the Morag Junction in the Gaza Strip.

The police officer was taken to Soroka Hospital in Beersheba, where he was treated for shock.

Israeli and Palestinian forces launched searches for the bombers. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD Summer camps in Belarus reawaken Jewish identity

By Deborah Kazis

RAKOV, Belarus (JTA) — The first day of summer camp is much the same around the world.

Here in the town of Rakov — a 40-mile drive west of Minsk — 160 children arrive to spend two weeks at the Bnei Akiva summer camp this month.

Nervous smiles and hesitant glances are shared around the huge dining hall tables during the first camp meal. Over soup, thick black bread and the local version of bug juice — glasses of water half-filled with peaches — the youths, ages 11 to 17, are getting to know each other.

The dining hall, once used by the Communist youth movement, is now covered with Israeli flags and colorful posters of Israel, Jerusalem and the Western Wall.

“Our main aim is to enrich their Jewish identity and prepare them for life in Israel,” says Jeremy Kurnedz, the 30-year-old head of Bnei Akiva in the former Soviet Union.

Young Israeli counselors — girls in long skirts and sandals, boys in jeans and yarmulkes — stand in front of the tables and begin to teach the children songs in Russian and Hebrew. Their enthusiasm and warmth helps calm the first-day jitters.

“Belarus is not an easy population,” says Kurnedz. “The Jews here are further away from Judaism than are the Jews of Ukraine. In Belarus it’s a fight.”

Four tall boys in tank tops sporting Jewish stars and crew cuts have come from the town of Bobruysk. Ruslan, Artum and two Edwards hope there will be boxing and karate at the camp and have claimed a table in the rear. They agree that they like the camp because there is a lot of dancing and the girls are pretty.

Three boisterous sisters with huge smiles and masses of dark curly hair have traveled from the town of Rogechev in eastern Belarus, where only about 20 Jewish families now live.

Jane, Angela and Svieta pose in front of a painting of three Communist youths saluting Lenin that now shares a wall with photos of Israeli folk dancing in Jerusalem.

Lenin used as a dartboard

Across the room, another picture of Lenin has been used as a dartboard.

Many of the children will soon be on their way to Israel with their families.

“There are numerous examples of parents who have made aliyah because of the influence of their children,” says Kurnedz.

Some 300 to 350 Jews make aliyah to Israel each month from Belarus and another 250 or 300 go to the United States, Canada or Germany.

The younger people are leaving behind an increasingly elderly population.

“About 1 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust on territory that is now Belarus,” says Leonid Levin, a prominent Minsk architect who is president of the Belarus Jewish community.

As in other countries formerly under Soviet rule, communism forcibly eradicated much of the Jewish identity and knowledge of the Jews who survived and remained.

But unlike many of the Eastern European Jewish communities, which today have small Jewish populations, a sizeable Jewish community remains in Belarus.

“There are more than 30,000 Jews in Minsk and more than 100,000 in all of Belarus,” says Levin.

“Ours is a very big community — the fourth-largest in Europe.” □

Buenos Aires Jews look ahead with rebuilding of headquarters

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — In an effort to put the pall of terror behind them, Jewish officials here last week hosted a festive party to mark the start of reconstruction of the Jewish headquarters destroyed last year by a massive bomb blast.

Former Argentine President Raul Alfonsin, Israeli Ambassador to Argentina Yitzhak Aviran and representatives of Jewish institutions were among the 200 guests attending the party for the rebuilding of the Argentine Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA, headquarters on Pasteur Street.

The terrorist blast on July 18, 1994, killed 86 people and left at least 300 wounded.

AMIA President Alberto Crupnicoff invited the guests to sign a parchment that was scheduled to be placed under the building’s foundation stone.

AMIA officials also invited the local population at large to add their signatures to the parchment before the foundation stone is put into place later this week. □

Survey says Israeli children among poorest in the West

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli children are among the poorest in Western industrialized countries, according to a new study conducted by an institute in Luxembourg.

The findings of the study, reported this week in The New York Times, found that the poorest of the poor children were in Ireland, followed by Israel and the United States.

According to the study, conducted by the nonprofit Luxembourg Income Study, households with poor children in Israel had an annual after-tax income of \$7,871.

In the United States, the annual after-tax family income is \$10,923, and in Ireland, that annual income is \$6,692.

In relative terms, Swiss and Swedish poor children are the best off, both with an annual family after-tax income of \$18,829.

But the gap between after-tax household incomes of poor and rich children in Israel was found to be among the smallest of the Western nations, at \$25,521. That gap in the United States was the widest of the countries studied, at \$54,613.

Some Western countries, such as Spain and Greece, were not included in the study because even though many poor children live there, data was limited.

Child poverty has risen in Israel, the study also showed.

But in Jerusalem, social researchers said the study was based on 1991 data and that the current picture for Israeli children was not as bleak.

Several programs have been initiated toward increasing the level of income support for families and children below the poverty line, Jack Habib told Israel Radio.

Habib is a professor and the director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Brookdale Center for Social Challenges.

He cited two such recent moves: the expansion of child allowances for single-parent families and the expansion of child allowances for families with a disabled parent.

Habib stressed that the problem still was serious, but that 1994 figures point to fewer children living below the poverty line. □

Rabin reverses strategy on settlers encamped on hills*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has announced a new strategy for settlers camping out on West Bank hillsides: Let them bake in the sun.

"If there are those who go up on a hill against the law," Rabin said Tuesday, "we will let them dehydrate awhile."

But Rabin said he would not permit the settlers to build any permanent structures at the sites of their demonstrations.

The stance marked a reversal of Rabin's recent marching orders for Israeli security forces, which for the past two weeks have been forcibly removing protesting settlers from the hot, shrub-covered hillsides of the West Bank.

The settlers began occupying the hillsides earlier this month in an effort to thwart the still-evolving agreement for extending Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank.

Rabin's announcement came as Israeli police continued their efforts to reconstruct the events surrounding the violence that erupted this week when Palestinians clashed with settlers at a hillside encampment near the West Bank settlement of Beit El.

The incident occurred Sunday when some 100 Palestinian residents of the nearby Arab village of Deir al-Kara went to the hill, where they tore down a tent and set fire to an Israeli flag.

A short time later, a security officer from Beit El and several settlers came to the site and fired shots into the air to disperse the crowd.

Palestinian witnesses said 22-year-old Kheiri Al-Qaissi was hit by the gunfire. He later died in a hospital in Ramallah.

On Monday, Israeli police arrested their fourth suspect in connection with the shooting, Ze'ev Lipskind, a resident of Beit El.

Lipskind was identified from newspaper photographs showing him pointing his rifle directly into the group of Palestinians on Sunday.

Fired into the air

Lipskind, who was questioned at Ramallah police headquarters, was not cooperating with the investigation, according to police officials, who said they were going to seek an extension of his detention.

Three other Jewish settlers detained in connection with the shooting were brought before the Jerusalem Magistrates Court on Monday for a hearing.

The judge extended by 48 hours the detention of two of them, Beit El security officer Yehuda Dana and the secretary of the Beit El council, Rabbi Haim Sultan.

The court released on bail a third suspect, Beit El spiritual leader Rabbi Shalom Patchenik, after police found no connection between him and the events.

The judge ruled that Dana had overstepped his bounds of authority when he fired into the air to disperse the rioters.

But Dana proclaimed his innocence.

"I know the shots I fired were not the ones" that killed the Palestinian, Dana told reporters in the courtroom. "The bullets in my gun were different from those they found in his body."

Police officials said they believed Al-Qaissi was hit by a bullet from an M-16. Dana's weapon was an Uzi submachine gun.

Sunday's shooting death drew heated calls for vengeance from Palestinians.

Dozens of Palestinian youths rioted in Ramallah on Monday, and Israeli troops were called in to disperse them.

Meanwhile, in the latest expression of opposition to the peace process, a group of residents from central Israel announced their plans to settle a hilltop in the West Bank.

Organizer Aaron Lerner said the land in question had been turned over by the army to a regional council nearly 10 years ago.

"We're not going on to land that is questionable" or owned by an Arab family, he said.

He said the demonstrators planned to build "permanent structures" at the site. □

Israel offers air space in case of Iraqi attack*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials have agreed to allow American planes to fly over Israel in the event of an Iraqi attack against Jordan.

Concern over such an attack comes in the wake of last week's defections to Amman, Jordan, of two high-level Iraqi officials.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the planes would come from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which was scheduled to arrive in the port of Haifa this week.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expressed doubts that there would be an Iraqi invasion of Jordan. He added that the developments surrounding the defections did not pose an immediate threat to Israel.

"I don't think the issue has any direct effect on Israel," he told reporters at the Knesset.

"Jordan is an independent country, and I think the Jordanians view it as an inter-Arab issue."

Rabin met Tuesday with Gen. Jack Sheehan, commander in chief of the U.S. Atlantic Command and of NATO operations in the Atlantic.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported that the meeting had been planned before the defections took place.

The United States and Jordan were scheduled to begin joint military exercises at the end of this week near the Iraqi border.

About 2,000 American soldiers are expected to take part in the exercises.

Pentagon officials maintained that the exercises were planned before Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel Hassan and his brother, Lt. Col. Saddam Kamel Hassan, defected to Jordan on July 10 along with their families and other Iraqi military officers. The two men are sons-in-law of Saddam Hussein.

Hussein Kamel Hassan was responsible for the development of Iraq's arms industry.

He was also reportedly responsible for firing 39 Scud missiles at Israel during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Last week, President Clinton pledged to protect Jordan if it were threatened by Iraq.

Defense Secretary William Perry said in an interview this week with the Washington Times that the U.S. defense could include the use of Tomahawk cruise missiles, which he said were already in range of Iraqi targets.

The defense secretary also spoke of a "sizable purge going on in the Iraqi government" in the wake of the defections.

In an interview with the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, Jordan's King Hussein suggested that such a purge would be a welcome development.

"If a change occurs, it will only be for the better," the king was quoted as saying. □