



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Civil liberties and Jewish groups said a Tennessee Senate resolution urging homes, businesses, schools and places of worship to post and observe the Ten Commandments is unconstitutional. The measure is one of several pieces of legislation conservative lawmakers and the religious right are attempting to push through the Tennessee Legislature. [Page 3]

■ A House International Relations subcommittee held hearings on the worldwide persecution of Jews. The session was designed to shed light on the plight of Jews, specifically in the former Soviet Union and Iran, in an effort to win continued support for the American refugee resettlement program.

■ President Clinton asked for congressional approval for a \$200 million request for a military package for Jordan that includes 16 F-16 fighter jets. Clinton hopes Congress will include the money in a stopgap spending measure.

■ Prime Minister Shimon Peres warned Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat that the scheduled redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron might be postponed if he does not curb Palestinian terrorism. Peres told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that Arafat should learn from other Arab leaders how to deal with terror. [Page 2]

■ Israel will soon release some 36 Jordanians jailed for infiltrating Israel and other military activities, according to Jordanian Information Minister Marwan Muasher. Israel and Jordan have been negotiating the release for the past year.

■ Israel's internal security minister said it appeared that an Arab American shot dead by bystanders after his car plowed into a crowd at a Jerusalem bus stop intended to cause carnage. [Page 2]

■ Israel Defense Force troops shot and wounded a Palestinian who ran an Israeli roadblock in the Gaza Strip. Jewish settlers said a dispute erupted between IDF soldiers and Palestinian police after the shooting.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Twin suicide attacks throw Israel's elections wide open

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The suicide bombings that claimed 25 victims in Jerusalem and Ashkelon have thrown Israel's election campaign wide open.

Opinion polls taken in the wake of Sunday's attacks registered an immediate surge of support for Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who until this week was lagging behind Prime Minister Shimon Peres by a wide margin.

The bombings, moreover, have given new impetus to efforts to bring popular maverick leader David Levy and his supporters back into Likud and thus reunite the right in the battle for the country's support on May 29.

Netanyahu himself, in a display of political dignity and acumen that won him plaudits from across the political spectrum, adopted a low-key, nonpolemical posture in the aftermath of Sunday's twin disasters.

"This is not the time for arguments and divisions," he told a somber, crowded Knesset on Monday afternoon. "The nation is united in its mourning, and in its strength."

Peres, looking drawn and pale at the Knesset forum, reiterated the government's long-standing double commitment: to press ahead with the peace process and with war against Islamic fundamentalist terror.

As the premier spoke, a potentially dangerous dispute was building up among his ministers and senior aides — and leaking out to the media.

At issue is the question why a two-week closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was lifted last Friday despite intelligence warnings of possible bomb attacks and despite the fact that Sunday marked the second anniversary of the Hebron massacre, in which 29 Palestinian worshipers were killed by a West Bank Jewish settler.

As a result of the bombings, and the questions that followed, Peres now faces perhaps the toughest test of leadership in his long political career.

The opinion polling shows people reinforced in their basic political outlook by this latest terror outrage.

Those prepared to countenance a Palestinian state, for instance — just more than 50 percent of the public, according to leading pollster Mina Tzemach — remain entrenched in that position, as do those opposed to Palestinian independence.

But the more immediate issue of personal security has apparently taken a heavy toll on Peres' hitherto commanding lead over Netanyahu.

Just prior to the attack, Tzemach was showing the prime minister a dozen points ahead of his Likud challenger. A poll published Monday in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot showed Peres at 46 percent, Netanyahu at 43 and David Levy at 6 in a three-way fight for the prime ministership.

In a direct matchup between Peres and Netanyahu, the gap was reduced still further, to 48-46.

That arithmetic reinforces Netanyahu's urgent desire to bring Levy "back home" to Likud.

Netanyahu-Levy deal brewing

Israeli media reported Tuesday that Levy, who broke away from Likud to form his own Geshet Party and was planning to run for the prime ministership, had reached an agreement in principle to latch onto the joint list of Likud and Tsomet.

Netanyahu is apparently offering Levy terms similar to those which led Rafael Eitan in mid-February to merge his right-wing Tsomet Party into a joint electoral list with Likud. That would mean guaranteed places for seven of Levy's people among the first 40 on the Likud electoral list.

The reports say Eitan himself has offered to move down one slot, from second place to third on the Likud list, in order to accommodate Levy as No. 2.

The reports engendered immediate grumbling within Likud ranks, where faithful party members would find themselves battling for a shrunken and inadequate number of "safe" seats on the party list.

Not everyone in the Likud agreed this week with Netanyahu's low-

key tactics after the bombings. For his part, Peres saluted the Likud leader for his statesmanlike restraint.

And observers believe that Netanyahu's tactic of deliberately spurning an ostensible opportunity to reap "electoral capital" from the carnage will in fact work to his party's benefit.

The Israeli nation after Yitzhak Rabin's assassination is not the same seething and volatile place that it was before that trauma, and a strident response by the opposition may not have struck a responsive chord.

Even hardline rightists, sworn foes of the Labor-led government, have largely preferred to keep a low profile after Sunday's blasts.

The hoarse shouts of "Peres traitor" flung at the premier when he briefly toured the blood-spattered Jerusalem street Sunday morning were few and far between — in contrast to the violent masses that thronged the sites of bus bombs during the 1994-1995 series of terror attacks.

But the more silent and more sullen mood of fear and fury engulfing the nation offers little cause for comfort for the government camp, as the immediate post-bombing polls proved.

Granted, the pendulum is likely to swing back if a period of respite now ensues. Monday's poll figures reflected an initial, instinctive outpouring of frustration.

But, as Rabin experienced to his profound distress during an earlier series of attacks, the swing back never goes all the way. Some of that frustration sticks, and the government suffers from it.

Even Rabin, the epitome of the gruff, straight-shooting military hero who enjoyed the trust even of people who did not support him politically, saw his standing sag in the face of repeated suicide bombings.

For Peres, the challenge is even tougher.

Although a successful past prime minister, defense minister and deputy defense minister, he has always suffered what pundits dub a "credibility problem."

He lost four straight elections — in 1977, 1981, 1984 and 1988 — largely because of his inability to give the public confidence in him as a leader.

The Israeli public's reaction to Sunday's bombings — a reaction of a profound but muted grief — may signify a new realism in Israel.

And Peres once again finds himself facing a fateful test of character and leadership. Can Peres find the path to the nation's broken heart, and offer the solace and reassurance that are the stuff of leadership?

"What is the lesson to be learned?" the popular and influential journalist Nahum Barnea said Monday afternoon, standing over the grave of his 20-year-old soldier son, Yoni, who was killed on the Jerusalem bus.

"I don't know. I do not understand what has happened. I am protected by my lack of understanding."

In many ways, his searingly insightful comment applies to all of Israel this week.

How the process of grasping for answers will pan out politically over the three months ahead is the question that the country, the region and indeed the world are pondering. □

Investigation of accident shows driver intended to kill

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One day after a car driven by an Arab American plowed into a group of people waiting at a bus stop, killing one and injuring 23, Internal Security Minister Moshe Shahal said the driver acted with intent to kill.

Shahal's announcement Tuesday reversed the local police's initial assessment that Ahmed Abdel Hamidah had

lost control of the rented black Fiat Uno and that the incident was an accident.

The woman killed in the attack, Flora Yehiel-Twito, 24, was buried in Kiryat Ata on Tuesday.

The incident Monday came amid the tense atmosphere generated by Sunday's terror attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon, in which 27 people, including the two suicide bombers, were killed.

Pedestrians were waiting at the bus stop at a busy intersection near Jerusalem's French Hill neighborhood when Hamidah's car, traveling at a high speed, crashed into the shelter.

Two civilian bystanders shot and killed Hamidah after the crash.

Shahal said a background check had found that Hamidah, a former drug addict, had recently become a devout Muslim and that he might have links to the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad organization.

"It's not final, but I have the latest assessment from the checks done by police," he said. "The tendency is to see yesterday's incident as an attack."

Jerusalem Police Chief Aryeh Amit told reporters, "Most of the signs rule out a traffic accident. The car and brakes were in working order. One of the skid marks we saw yesterday apparently did not come from this car."

He said some of the skid marks found were made when the car accelerated toward the people on the pavement.

He added that police had found a paper with the words "Islamic Jihad" in the car, though it was not a claim of responsibility.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that Hamidah told friends that morning that they would see him on television that night.

The acquaintances were quoted as saying that they did not give his statements any thought. □

Peres ready to postpone IDF redeployment in Hebron

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres said this week that the redeployment of Israel Defense Force troops in Hebron might be postponed if the Palestinian Authority fails to curb Palestinian terrorism.

Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations here on Tuesday, Peres said in response to a question that if Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat "doesn't fulfill his obligations in this regard, we will have to consider many options, including this one of Hebron."

His comments came two days after suicide bombers from the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group carried out deadly attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon.

The IDF is scheduled to redeploy next month in Hebron — the only West Bank town still under Israeli control.

"Israel has already told Arafat that he must disarm the terrorists and arrest their leaders in his own house," Peres said. "If he cannot do this it will create a problem for him."

Peres told the American Jewish leaders, who are in Israel on a Conference of Presidents mission, that Arafat "should take a lesson from" Jordan's King Hussein, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Syrian leader Hafez Assad, "who take care of terrorism in their countries fairly effectively."

Peres reaffirmed his positions on Jerusalem and settlements: "Jerusalem must remain united as the capital of Israel. There will be no return to the 1967 borders, and no Jewish settlements will be dismantled." □

Ten Commandments anyone? Tennessee urges mass posting

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Civil liberties and Jewish groups have criticized a resolution passed by the Tennessee Senate urging homes, businesses, schools and places of worship to post and observe the Ten Commandments.

The groups objected to the action as an unconstitutional move toward state sponsorship of religion.

"Its unconstitutionality is a no-brainer," said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

"The only part of this case that's going to require any thought is who can bring it" to court for a challenge, he said. "Once you get over that threshold, you can stop thinking."

The measure, touted by the religious right and conservative legislators as a way to reaffirm moral standards, overwhelmingly passed the state Senate in a 27-1 vote and now awaits approval by the House.

State Sen. Steven Cohen, the Senate's only Jewish member, cast the lone dissenting vote.

"It's not only a violation of the law, but of the spirit upon which this country was based," said Cohen, a 14-year legislator from Memphis. "The government's job is not to suggest, promote or choose religious thought to be recommended to the people. If we let the government choose the Ten Commandments, we could next let the government choose the Koran, the Lord's Prayer, or the crucifix, and that's not the government's choice."

Tennessee's Jewish community, meanwhile, is still debating how to respond to the state Senate's action.

"The Jewish community in middle Tennessee is very supportive of religious freedom and of the Ten Commandments," said Frank Boehm, chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Nashville.

"This is the kind of issue that most people believe should be taught in the homes. Whether to make it a law is a sensitive issue, and something we're still debating."

The resolution refers to declining moral standards and notes that the Founding Fathers "respected the place that the Ten Commandments occupy in the history of law and government."

'Brownshirt-type fervor'

Charles Burson, the state attorney general, said on the day of the vote last week that the resolution violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment, which prohibits Congress from making laws "respecting an establishment of religion."

Gov. Don Sundquist, a Republican serving his first term, has not yet indicated whether he would sign the resolution.

Through their action, Cohen said, Tennessee's legislators sent a clear message to the religious right.

"They're saying we're with you and we're for God, regardless of whether we violate our oath of office and are against the Constitution," Cohen said.

To pass the resolution "was like a brownshirt-type fervor," with the Senate communicating "the idea that we didn't care what the law was and that we have right to change it and stand above it."

Stern agreed that the Senate vote shows the hubris of lawmakers determined to defy what they apparently see as "nonsense handed down by the Supreme Court about separation between church and state."

"It's sort of an in-your-face vote," he said. "That's troubling because you have lawmakers that don't see themselves bound by law."

The resolution on the Ten Commandments is one of several pieces of legislation conservative lawmakers and the religious right are attempting to push through the Tennessee Legislature.

A committee in the Tennessee Senate last week approved a bill that would permit school boards to dismiss teachers who teach evolution theory as a fact rather than a theory. Other pending legislation deals with fetal rights and the promotion of public prayer. □

'It's time for a showdown,' says Farrakhan to Congress

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — Back in the United States after a whirlwind 18-nation tour of Africa and the Middle East, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan is daring the U.S. Congress to call him in for questioning.

"I call your bluff. Bring me before Congress. It's time for a showdown," Farrakhan told a crowd of 12,000 supporters Sunday at the University of Illinois in Chicago, his first public appearance since his return.

Spearheaded by Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), the House's most outspoken critic of the black nationalist Muslim, the International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights is scheduled to begin hearings March 19 on Farrakhan's activities abroad, with a focus on his relationships with leaders of nations that the U.S. government deems pariahs.

Farrakhan's itinerary included Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Libya. In Libya, leader Muammar Gadhafi pledged \$1 billion to Farrakhan to finance political activities in the United States. During his stopovers, Farrakhan publicly railed against U.S. policy toward those countries.

The House subcommittee will be "looking at the issue of Farrakhan's world tour of terror," said King spokesman Dan Michaelis.

"The first round of the investigation will be into the lack of action by the administration," said Michaelis, adding that there is "reason to believe" that the administration had a copy of Farrakhan's tour schedule.

"Nothing was done to check his passport upon his return," Michaelis said.

U.S. citizens are prohibited from visiting certain countries without special State Department permission.

This week, the White House denounced Farrakhan's trip as a "thugfest tour."

Meanwhile, the Treasury Department is investigating whether Farrakhan broke U.S. law by spending American currency in Iran, Iraq or Libya.

The Justice Department has put Farrakhan on notice, saying that it will launch an investigation if he receives the money from Libya. He would have to register as a foreign agent, the Justice Department said. Accepting "\$1 billion from Col. Gadhafi would put him in the category of foreign agent," Michaelis said.

In his Chicago speech, Farrakhan defended his tour and the heads of state he met.

"Gadhafi is a revolutionary. He's my friend. He's my brother," Farrakhan said. "Gadhafi is hated because he's the leader of a small country that is rich. But he uses his money to finance liberation struggles."

Farrakhan said that if Congress calls him to testify, he would "call the roll of members of Congress who are honorary members of the Israeli Knesset."

Jews, he said, "had wrapped their tentacles around the U.S. government."

He also attacked the U.S. foreign aid program. "Every year, you give Israel \$4 [billion] to \$6 billion of the taxpayer money and you haven't asked the people nothing," he said. "Who are you an agent of?" □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

**Lives and dreams cut short
for a couple full of commitment**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Soon after Matthew Eisenfeld and Sara Duker met, it became clear to those around them that the couple would one day be married and together build a life full of love and commitment, to each other and to Judaism.

But their lives and their dreams were cut short by the suicide bomber who on Sunday annihilated the Jerusalem bus on which they rode as they traveled to Jordan.

Instead of sharing their lives together, Matt and Sara were to be buried side by side this week at the Beth El Temple Cemetery in Avon, Conn.

Matt and Sara, described by those who knew them as vibrant, intelligent and passionate, were on the bus because they were going to visit Jordan while Matt had a break from his classes at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary campus in Jerusalem. He was in his second year of rabbinical school.

Sara was working as a research technician in a microbiology lab at Hebrew University.

Her mother, Arline Duker, said Monday that when her daughter died, Sara "was where she wanted to be, with people she loved, in a land she loved."

Many of their friends said the way they died is bitterly ironic, because they were both committed to peace.

"It's so ironic that because of the peace process they could go to Jordan, and because of violence by people who were against peace, they were killed," said David Seidenberg, a graduate student at JTS, where a service was held Monday in their memory.

"They were into peace," said Seidenberg, tears welling up in his eyes as he remembered Sara, whom he had known since she was a student at Barnard College, located across the street.

At the memorial service Monday, classmates of Matt's and people who had known Sara because she spent time at the seminary — including serving as a leader at High Holiday services last September — were pale and tearful.

Matt "was a very, very special soul," said Marcy Rascoe, also a second-year rabbinical student at the seminary. "He was not only blessed with an incredible intellect and wisdom, but what drove him even more was his absolute love of humanity."

'People wanted to learn with him'

"I can't think of a bigger contrast than for Matt to die because of hate," said Rascoe, who worked with him last summer teaching at one of the Conservative movement's camps, where Matt also ran the "beit midrash," or study hall, and served as the camp's kashrut supervisor.

"The way he died is the absolute antithesis of everything he believed and everything he lived. Everything he lived was full of love. He said nonstop that anything was solvable if there was more love," Rascoe said.

Matt, 25, was a native of West Hartford, Conn. He attended Yale University as an undergraduate, majoring in religious studies. While there, he became involved in Young Israel House at Yale and Yale Hillel, where he inspired many students with his dedication.

"He would sit down and study Gemarah and people would want to sit and study and learn with him," said Josh Cahan, a Yale senior.

Eisenfeld was also a member of Yale's Political Union and was a founder of "Magevet," Yale's Jewish a cappella singing group.

After graduation, he spent a year in Israel at

Yeshiva Himiztar in Efrat, and then returned to the United States to enroll in the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Sara, 22, who grew up in Teaneck, N.J., had attended The Frisch Yeshiva High School in Paramus, N.J., and majored in environmental science at Barnard, where she graduated last May summa cum laude. She also was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Last year, Sara went to Siberia as a participant in an environmental studies exchange program between the United States and Russia.

Also last year, Sara won first place in an essay contest sponsored by the Israel Aliyah Center of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Her prize was a round-trip ticket to Israel.

"Until now we have taken for granted that Israel would 'put the kippah on our heads,' that Israel would do much of the work of shaping Jewish identity," wrote Sara in her essay.

"As Israel continually struggles with its own identity, it is important to be reminded of the essence of Heschel's statement — 'The State of Israel is a spiritual revolution; not a one time event, but an ongoing revolution.' The key ideas are 'spiritual' and 'ongoing,'" she wrote, referring to Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel.

She was the second Frisch alumna to be killed within a year by Hamas terrorists in Israel. Alisa Flatow, a native of West Orange, N.J., who graduated from Frisch in 1992, a year after Sara, was killed last April.

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Bergen County and North Hudson, N.J., issued a statement commending the government of Israel "for its determination to hunt down the criminals who planned and carried out this foul deed as well as its refusal to allow the sworn enemies of Israel to dictate the course of the peace process."

Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Bill Bradley, both Democrats of New Jersey, issued statements condemning the terrorist attacks in Israel.

'Died in the name of love'

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak sent letters of condolences to the families, saying: "Your loss will be imprinted on our national memory forever."

At the memorial service Monday at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which was attended by more than 200 people, Rabbi William Lebeau, dean of the rabbinical school, said, "We need space to contemplate the blast that has disturbed our world. No words are necessary. In our being together, we try to find comfort."

Ephraim Ben-Matitياهو, Israel's consul for academic affairs, said Matt and Sara "died in the name of love, for their people, for each other and for their heritage."

After the service, the students and faculty softly sang psalms. They were gathered in a sanctuary whose east wall is composed of an enormous stained glass window with rich reds, blues and purples shaped into the flames of the biblical burning bush, which the seminary uses as its logo with the Bible's words "and the bush was not consumed."

The Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford has set up a fund in Matt's memory. Donations to the Matthew Eisenfeld Memorial Fund may be sent to the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, 333 Bloomfield Ave., West Hartford, Conn. 06117.

The Duker family has asked that donations in Sara's memory be made to the Jewish National Fund. □

(Alexandra J. Wall of the Jewish Standard of Teaneck, N.J., and Stacey Dresner of the Connecticut Jewish Ledger contributed to this report.)