

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ **The Israeli government vowed to obliterate the fundamentalist Hamas movement after a fatal bombing destroyed a Jerusalem bus, the third terror attack in the capital city in eight days. Prime Minister Shimon Peres denied that he would consider forming a national unity government to deal with heightened terrorism. [Page 1]**

■ **A plan to separate Israelis and Palestinians was approved by the Israeli Cabinet in a new effort to combat terrorism. The plan calls for erecting a security fence between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and tightening security in Jerusalem and on public buses. [Page 1]**

■ **The death toll in the Feb. 25 bus bombing in Jerusalem rose to 26 after a 23-year-old Palestinian who was wounded in the terrorist attack died over the weekend. Wael Qawasmi, one of five Palestinians injured in the explosion, was driving to work when the bomb exploded.**

■ **Dozens of Jewish leaders from federations across the United States will come to Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress and the administration on behalf of immigrant rights and against budget cuts. The delegation, which is being led by the Council of Jewish Federations, is scheduled to meet with Vice President Al Gore and senior congressional leaders as well as dine with Jewish members of Congress.**

■ **Oliver Bode, the 29-year-old publisher of a neo-Nazi newspaper in Germany, was detained after arriving in Toronto with a suitcase of racist videos for Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel. Bode will remain in custody until a deportation hearing is held.**

■ **Relatives of 335 Italian men and boys executed by the Nazi SS won the right to face in court the man accused of organizing the massacre. The ruling means that family members of those killed by the Nazis in March 1944 at the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome can take part in the war crimes trial of Erich Priebke, 82.**

**Cabinet adopts separation plan in wake of Hamas bombing wave***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Within hours after a suicide bomber blew up a Jerusalem bus, the Israeli Cabinet voted to implement a plan to separate the Israeli and Palestinian populations.

The decision to invest in separating Israel from the West Bank and Gaza Strip comes as the Peres government, reeling from a series of attacks by the fundamentalist Hamas group in the past week, vowed to root out the terrorist cells and destroy them.

"This is an all-out war, which requires unilateral measures" that must be "implemented immediately," Prime Minister Shimon Peres said after Sunday's blast, the third bombing in eight days.

"We have decided to give the war on terror top priority," Peres said. "We will use every means and will not be deterred."

The blast Sunday in Jerusalem was an eerie repetition of the Feb. 25 suicide bus bombing near the city's central bus station, in which 26 people, including the bomber, were killed. Two young Americans were among the dead.

Also Feb. 25, a suicide bomber blew up a soldiers hitchhiking post in Ashkelon, killing one other person.

Sunday's bombing left at least 19 dead, including the bomber, and at least 10 wounded. All the victims were believed to be passengers on the bus.

Six of the dead were Romanian workers who had come to Israel to replace Palestinian workers banned from entering the Jewish state.

The attack occurred as the bus drove along the same route, No. 18, as in the earlier bombing, which occurred about the same time one week ago to the day.

Sunday's blast, which took place at 6:25 a.m. as the bus made its way along Jaffa Road, blew off the roof of the bus, scattering blood and body parts and shattering storefronts.

"The bomb used was very similar to the one last week," Police Commissioner Assaf Hefetz told reporters. The bomb used Sunday contained more than 30 pounds of explosives and was filled with nails.

Hefetz stressed that an overall solution for the security situation must be found.

"Attacks happen everywhere, in Jerusalem and other places and not just on buses," he said.

The separation plan adopted by the Cabinet at its weekly meeting Sunday includes constructing a perimeter fence along the line between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza and creating 18 crossing points to monitor travel between the two areas.

Peres said \$100 million had been allocated for the separation plan.

In addition, the Cabinet approved the creation of a special force of 800 security guards to protect public buses.

The guards will be drawn from former members of Israel Defense Force combat units.

**End of 'celebrations of the martyr bombers'**

A plan to deploy additional police and security reinforcements in Jerusalem, also approved by the Cabinet, "has already begun," Peres told reporters. "We will fill this city with the security forces needed to ensure its security."

Police and soldiers also will be stationed at bus stops and hitchhiking stops throughout the country to check passengers, the prime minister said.

In a measure seen as an effort to deter suicide bombers, the ministers approved steps against the families of bombers, which would include sealing their homes and demolishing them.

Peres said this would bring an end to the "celebrations of the martyr bombers."

He said the homes of the two Hamas militants believed to be responsible for the Feb. 25 twin bombings would be sealed. The attackers were from the West Bank village of Al-Fawwar, near Hebron.

Peace negotiations with the Palestinians, suspended after the twin attacks, will not resume until Palestinian Council President Yasser Arafat

takes sufficient measures against the fundamentalist groups, Peres told the Cabinet.

But President Ezer Weizman, seeking stronger action, called on the Peres government to suspend immediately all negotiations with the Palestinians. "The peace process will not run away," he told Israel Radio. "We must suspend it, until we find a solution."

Weizman also urged all political parties to put aside their campaigns for the May 29 Knesset elections and join in working toward a solution to the security challenges.

Peres held consultations Sunday with opposition leaders, but he ruled out the possibility of establishing a national unity government.

At a time like this, "I do not differentiate between parties," he told reporters. "The entire country is right and left, young and old. I am convinced that we must first focus on this war against terror, and I believe this is the first priority of all parties."

The attack comes as public opinion polls showed a shrinking gap between Peres and Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu in the race for the premiership.

Peres, who once led Netanyahu by as much as 15 percentage points, has seen that lead drop to virtually nothing after the recent wave of Hamas terror attacks.

The Likud distanced itself from the anti-government demonstrations that erupted Sunday after the attacks, and called for unity.

"I met this morning with the prime minister and told him we would support the government if it takes intensive measures against terror," Netanyahu said in the Knesset. "I hope he adopts some of the measures I proposed."

Netanyahu called for imposing a total closure on the areas where terrorist organizations operate, closing down Orient House — the Palestine Liberation Organization's headquarters in eastern Jerusalem — and giving Israeli security forces freedom of activity in all areas.

Among those who rushed to the scene of Sunday's bus bombing was Edward Abbingdon, the U.S. consul general in Jerusalem, who surveyed the site in his jogging clothes.

"I heard the explosion go off, it was only about 400 meters from the consulate," he told Israel Radio. "I immediately went there. It was like a scene out of hell."

Expressing his horror at the bloody scene, Abbingdon said, "I can't understand how people can do this, and just tear people up with bombs."

When Peres arrived to survey the scene, he was jeered by a crowd shouting anti-government and anti-Arab slogans.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, who was also at the site, appealed for calm.

### **Military wings outlawed**

"All of our hearts are broken. I appeal to citizens [to] use restraint. We now have to deal with the problem," Olmert, also a Likud Party Knesset member, told Israel Radio.

U.S. envoy Abbingdon said he phoned Arafat after returning from the scene of the attack and "suggested that he ban groups like the Islamic Jihad and [Hamas], make membership in them illegal, and that he arrest and imprison those people who belong to those organizations."

Arafat issued a condemnation of the attack from his headquarters in Gaza.

And for the first time, the Palestinian leader said he would outlaw the military wings of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad organizations in the self-rule areas.

Israeli security officials were checking reports that the bomber was a university student from the Hebron area.

Hamas, which claimed responsibility for Sunday's bus bombing, also announced a three-month moratorium on attacks as long as Israel does not crack down on Hamas.

Hamas also said it was now giving Israel a chance to consider its offer, issued last week, to halt attacks against Israeli civilians in exchange for a prisoner release and other conditions.

The attack also comes as the closure of the West Bank and Gaza after the twin bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkelon was still in effect. Security officials recommended that the easing of the closure for humanitarian reasons, announced at the end of last week, be immediately revoked.

In addition to the three Hamas bombings, one Israeli was killed last week in Jerusalem when an Arab American plowed his rental car into a crowded bus stop. The driver was shot dead by two civilians. Hamas claimed responsibility for that attack as well. □

### **IDF captures armed Hamas cell**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel Defense Force troops have captured a cell of five Hamas members that planned to attack a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

The five, who were between the ages of 16 and 18, last Friday night apparently infiltrated the Israeli-controlled area of Gush Katif from Khan Yunis, and managed to get close to the Jewish settlement of Gadid.

The would-be attackers from the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, who said they had trained for a month for an attack, were armed with several firebombs, a gun, knives and axes.

They also had a copy of the Koran.

An Israeli army patrol caught the Hamas members after they set off an electronic alarm.

The head of Israeli troops in Gaza, Brig. Gen. Yitzhak Eitan, reportedly said the suspects planned to kill Jews who were at home in observance of Shabbat.

Two other members of the cell who had remained in the Palestinian-controlled area were apprehended by Palestinian police.

Hamas, who has claimed responsibility for the latest series of terror attacks in Israel, has demanded the removal of all Jewish settlements from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. □

### **Doctors: Amir fit to stand trial**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Psychiatrists who examined Yigal Amir have concluded that the confessed assassin of Yitzhak Rabin is fit to stand trial.

Amir had agreed to be evaluated at the suggestion of Tel Aviv District Judge Edmond Levy, who said it would ensure that the accused would have fair legal representation.

Judges hearing the case Sunday gave defense attorneys the results of the examination, performed by three state psychiatrists, who found that Amir was of sound mind and was not mentally distressed in any way.

The judges then resumed hearing evidence at the first court session after a monthlong recess for the tests.

Amir was scheduled to appear before the court Monday.

Amir, a 25-year-old religious Jew, admitted to shooting the prime minister when he left a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv. Amir, who also faces charges of conspiracy in a separate trial, said that when he shot Rabin, he intended only to paralyze him and to force him out of the political arena. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

**Stunned by wave of terror, Jerusalemites question peace**

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Emotions of fear, anger, shock and helplessness surged through the Israeli capital as Jerusalemites again buried the victims of another Palestinian terrorist attack — the third in this city in eight days.

Exactly one week after a suicide bomber blew up a No. 18 bus, killing 25 and wounding scores more, Israelis awoke Sunday to learn that a nearly identical attack had taken place in the heart of the capital city.

Sunday's bombing of another No. 18 bus, also on Jaffa Road, in which 19 people, including the bomber, died, pushed a city already on edge nearly past the breaking point.

The bombing was the third terror attack in Jerusalem, and the fourth in Israel, in the not-so-distant past.

Also Feb. 25, a suicide bomber struck at a hitchhiking post in Ashkelon, killing a soldier.

The next day an Arab American plowed his car into a Jerusalem bus stop, killing one, before he was shot dead by bystanders.

As if caught in a recurring nightmare, people here again frantically phoned friends and family after the most recent bus bombing to see whether they were alive or dead.

On television news, Israelis again saw the skeleton of a No. 18 bus standing crippled as black-coated men from the burial society Chevra Kadisha scraped body parts off the sidewalk.

After the victims were rushed away and the twisted metal remains of the bus were removed, local shopkeepers were allowed to size up the damage.

Closed at 6:25 a.m. — the time of the blast — many of the stores, cafes and kiosks were nonetheless damaged beyond recognition.

"This isn't peace," said Shlomo Dalbari, a 55-year-old cafe owner whose small restaurant was destroyed in the explosion.

But Dalbari did not express anger, just shock and bewilderment.

Dalbari, a passenger on the ill-fated No. 18 bus, escaped injury.

**Too much to absorb**

"I was on the bus that blew up, but I got off just in the nick of time," said Dalbari, standing outside the remains of his cafe.

"Usually, the bus driver, who I know very well, lets me off right at my cafe, but for some reason I decided to get off earlier."

"I heard a huge blast and saw the bodies," he added. "I can't say any more."

For Dalbari's son, Shai, the day's events were too much to absorb at once.

"I was on the bus behind the 18 and suddenly it exploded," he said in a shaky voice.

"I knew [my father] was on the bus and I jumped off to try to find him," Shai Dalbari said. "I couldn't find him anywhere and I was frantic. I've never known such fear."

"Then, 15 minutes later, I found him, alive and well. It is impossible to describe my feelings at that moment."

"My cafe is destroyed," the elder Dalbari said suddenly. "But that's not important now."

Broken dolls from a toy store, designer pillows from a fabric shop and oranges from a fruit-drink kiosk lay intermingled with the shattered glass that littered the street.

Three floors up, office workers surveyed the

damage from blown-out windows, pondering what carnage the bomb might have caused had the attack occurred an hour later, when the streets and buildings along Jaffa Road are usually packed with people.

While many agreed that things could have been worse, most Jerusalemites lining the blast site expressed anger.

"The government is doing nothing to protect us," charged 16-year-old Mazzie Hanoni, a student in high school.

"Last Monday, when a car rammed into people waiting at a bus stop, the government initially said it was an accident, not a terrorist attack. They're afraid to tell us the truth."

Noting that her father is a bus driver, Hanoni said, "Last week, when we heard about the blast we didn't know where my father was. I hope no one ever has to feel the fear we felt."

Batya Walker, a teacher who has five children, said she is worried about her family's safety.

"I'm sad and angry and I want the government to do more," she said. "A week ago I spoke to an official in the police department about tightening security and she told me that if the terrorists stop attacking buses they will simply attack someplace else. What kind of answer is that?"

Walker, who emigrated from New Jersey 25 years ago, said the government "ought to start issuing magnetic cards for Israeli citizens, and this could go a long way toward preventing terrorism."

Echoing the Cabinet's decision Sunday to implement a plan to separate the Israeli and Palestinian populations, Walker said, "What we need is a total division" between Jews and Arabs.

Instead of attending a school Purim party, 16-year-old Estie Levi decided to rush to the site of the blast.

"I was getting ready for school, for the party, when I heard about the attack. I just couldn't face going to school today," she said.

**'Like a second Holocaust'**

Tears in her eyes, Levi said, "Do you know the saying 'The month of Adar is a time to rejoice'? Instead of happiness, all we feel is horror."

"It's as if a second Holocaust has befallen Israel, and the government remains silent. I was in favor of the peace process, but now I know that peace between Jews and Arabs is impossible."

Rina Michaeli, a 40-year-old postal worker, said she was still in shock.

"The bomb went off right outside and it was total chaos when I arrived for work soon afterward. I saw bodies everywhere."

Speaking from the central post office, just a few yards from the bomb site, Michaeli, too, said she had lost hope in the peace process.

"Of course I want peace, but look what's happening."

"There is one attack after another, blast after blast — this is the action of a people that wants peace? My son, a soldier serving in South Lebanon, called this morning to see if I was injured."

"He told me that it's safer in Lebanon than in Jerusalem."

Walker said the peace process "is being handled in a slapdash way, as if some child were in charge. It's been poorly planned and Israelis are scared and uninformed."

"If I planned Shabbat dinners the way our government has planned the peace process, my family would be starving." □

**ON THE ELECTION TRAIL**

**Could Alexander attract significant Jewish support?**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — At the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., Saudi Arabia drew the ire of the Tennessee Jewish community when it handed out maps of the Middle East that conveniently omitted Israel.

Then-Gov. Lamar Alexander, standing alongside Jewish leaders, issued a rebuke, saying, "That isn't my view of Israel and isn't the view of most Tennesseans."

Now, as a leading candidate for the nation's highest office — many view him as the only viable opponent to Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole — Alexander has many supporters who talk about the strong relationship he has developed with Tennessee's Jewish community.

The Jews he befriended during his tenure as governor from 1979 to 1987 agree that he made strides in reaching out to the community. They cite as examples his creation of a state Holocaust commission and his trip to a Nashville high school to lecture on the Holocaust himself.

Despite the support, some view his record as governor and his stances on Jewish issues as a mixed bag.

In 1982, Alexander signed a bill permitting a moment of silence in Tennessee public schools. The measure was later struck down as unconstitutional.

A self-described conservative activist who served as education secretary in the Bush administration and favors school choice, Alexander remains a proud advocate of prayer in the public schools, a position opposed by many American Jews.

But in his message to Tennessee lawmakers upon signing the moment-of-silence bill, he said the measure would not require school prayer, but would provide for a minute of silence, prayer or meditation. "The bill accommodates religious beliefs, but does not advance them," he said at the time, adding that he signed it despite his belief that such matters should be left up to local school boards.

Lewis Lavine, a 20-year acquaintance who served for three years as Alexander's chief of staff when he was governor, believes that Jews can feel comfortable about Alexander's stance on religion and church-state separation.

"He is very religious without wearing religion on his sleeve," Lavine said in a telephone interview from Nashville. "He doesn't have to make a show of being a religious person or an ethical person, and he understands other religions and appreciates people who practice those religions."

**'Always for the underdog'**

Officials at Alexander's campaign said the candidate had no reaction to the latest move by Tennessee lawmakers to introduce religion into the state.

The Tennessee Senate recently passed a resolution urging homes, business, places of worship and schools to post and observe the Ten Commandments.

Jewish and civil liberties groups, along with the state's attorney general and a lone dissenting Jewish legislator, criticized the vote as an unconstitutional move toward state sponsorship of religion.

Frank Boehm, who chairs the Nashville Jewish Community Relations Council and has known Alexander since they went to college together at Vanderbilt University, said Alexander has long been committed to tolerance and nondiscrimination. "He was the kind of guy who admonished Vanderbilt for not putting more African Americans into the schools," Boehm said. "He was always for the underdog or the person who needed help."

Supporters say similar themes run through his positions on other issues.

Although Alexander favors a crackdown on illegal immigration and strict border enforcement, he opposes congressional efforts to cut back on the number of legal immigrants admitted to the United States.

At the same time, he opposes attempts to deny welfare benefits to legal immigrants, saying that it is un-American to single out a specific group of law-abiding people to treat "as an election-year punching bag by Washington politicians looking for an easy target."

On the issue of welfare, however, some Jewish leaders have sounded alarms over Alexander's proposal to "replace Washington welfare with neighborhood charity" because "private faith-based charities work better than government agencies."

Jews who favor abortion rights, meanwhile, view Alexander's stance as the lesser among evils advanced by GOP candidates. Alexander is pro-life, but opposes a constitutional amendment banning abortions, saying that the decision to enact restrictions should be left to the states.

Alexander's wife, Honey, once served on an advisory board of Planned Parenthood.

When it comes to Israel, Alexander calls himself a strong and committed supporter. He traveled to Israel in December 1994 on a fact-finding trip with his mentor, former Sen. Howard Baker, and former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger — both of whom are advisers to his campaign.

Alexander supports Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital, as well as moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.

But he remains vague on more complex issues, including the conditions under which he would support peace with Syria, or whether U.S. peacekeeping troops should be deployed on the Golan Heights in the event of an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement.

At the same time that Alexander's supporters tout him as the only candidate who can defeat President Clinton, his Jewish supporters tout him as the only Republican candidate who stands a chance of carrying a significant portion of the Jewish vote.

Between 70 percent and 80 percent of Jews typically support Democratic presidential candidates.

**'We've got Al Gore'**

"He has had a lot of support from the Jewish community because of his moderate stand on issues that have surfaced from time to time," Boehm said.

For that reason, he added, Alexander "is more palatable to Jews who traditionally vote Democratic." He predicted that "it would be a real interesting dilemma for Jews in Tennessee if it's Lamar against Bill Clinton."

Martin Sir, a Democrat who served in the Tennessee Legislature when Alexander was governor and is now treasurer of Jewish Family Services in Nashville, sees it differently. "I think that people will still support Clinton," Sir said. "We've got [Tennessee native] Al Gore here as vice president and Jews feel real good about him."

Ed Miller, research director of the Washington, D.C.-based Polling Company, a Republican concern, believes that if Alexander makes it to the general election, he has the potential to garner the highest level of Jewish support of any Republican candidate in recent years.

Miller believes that Alexander, as a moderate, stands the best chance of appealing nationally to younger Jewish voters, who tend to be more conservative.

Jewish supporters, meanwhile, downplayed Alexander's recent overture to the Christian Coalition in which said he would consider coalition founder Pat Robertson as a running mate.

Daniel Casse, a Jew who serves as director of policy for the Alexander campaign, said, "He hasn't counted anybody in or counted anybody out." □