



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Reform rabbis reacted with surprise to the mass media attention paid to their resolution to endorse gay civil marriages. [Page 3]

■ Prime Minister Shimon Peres promised to hold a referendum on any final peace agreement with the Palestinians. [Page 4]

■ Tensions escalated in southern Lebanon. The Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement launched some 30 rockets at Kiryat Shmona after Israeli forces shelled an area near a Lebanese village. [Page 2]

■ Prime Minister Shimon Peres and leading Israeli industrialists arrived in Oman, where they were received with a full state ceremony. They are slated to head to Qatar, where Peres will become the first Israeli prime minister to make a public visit to that nation. [Page 4]

■ The Israeli air force appointed a committee to investigate the cause of a helicopter crash that killed seven soldiers. The crash occurred during training exercises. [Page 4]

■ Russia's foreign minister reportedly refused to invite his Israeli counterpart for a meeting in Moscow. Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak submitted a request two months ago for a meeting with Yevgeny Primakov, who never answered the request. [Page 4]

■ Palestinian police near Ramallah fatally shot an Arab who ran a roadblock. The Palestinian police believed that the man had stolen the car in Israel and was trying to escape into the autonomous areas, Israel Radio reported.

■ Yitzhak Rabin Square was dedicated in Los Angeles in an emotional ceremony. Leah Rabin, the widow of the slain prime minister, was among the speakers.

■ A Jordanian general reportedly asked Israel for help in improving the Hashemite kingdom's border security. The meeting between Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Gen. Abdul-Hafez Murei-Ka'abneh marked the first official visit by an Arab military chief to the Jewish state.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### From Afula to Oklahoma City: Teens share pain — and healing

By Daniel Kurtzman

OKLAHOMA CITY (JTA) — Standing at the site of the demolished Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building here, Raz Oren sensed an all-too-familiar quality in the air.

"The feeling of death and quiet," he said. "It's here."

Two years ago, a Hamas terrorist detonated a car full of explosives at a bus stop in the northern Israeli town of Afula. The bomb blast, which killed eight, set Oren on fire.

He was 13 at the time.

Oren and four of his classmates and friends who were injured in the Afula bombing came to Oklahoma City last week to share stories of survival with those coping with the traumatic effects of the bombing that hit this city nearly one year ago.

A sixth teen-ager on the trip, 14-year-old Sivan Horesh, survived the bombing of the No. 5 bus on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street on Oct. 19, 1994.

The Anti-Defamation League arranged the visit, called Peers in Healing, to give the Israeli youths a chance to share their experiences as victims of terrorism with children, teen-agers and parents in Oklahoma City who are also working toward recovery and reconciliation.

During a week that served as a testament to the resiliency of youth and the healing powers of shared pain and hope, the Israelis spent much of their time visiting schools in and around Oklahoma City.

At Edmond Memorial High School north of the city, where shock waves ran through the halls when the bomb exploded April 19, 1995, students listened intently as the Israeli youths told their stories and answered questions.

"Every time a bombing happens, it happens all over for us again," Horesh said, adding, "We came to say no to violence, no to the killing and yes to peace."

The message resonated with 16-year-old Erin Israel of Edmond, a suburb of Oklahoma City.

Impressed with the Israelis' courage and spirit, she said the people of Oklahoma City could learn from the way the Israeli teen-agers had coped with trauma.

"They've stopped mourning and they've started healing," she said. "I think we need to get out of that phase in Oklahoma because people are sad, but we also need to heal."

As the Israelis moved from classroom to classroom, they drew a following of admirers. At times it was not clear who was trying to help whom.

"I'm hearing from the Israeli kids that they want to help heal people here," said Patti Harrold, a social studies teacher whose classes hosted the Israelis. "But I see our kids wanting to help them."

### 'They're a lot like us'

Ultimately, the talk turned away from bombs as the teens discovered that they were linked by more whimsical similarities. They found that they shared interests in music, Corvettes and the opposite sex.

"I pictured people from the Middle East differently, especially from Israel," said Andres Cantu, 17. "But after hearing them talk and talking with them, I realized they're a lot like us."

Even the language barrier could not prevent the teen-agers from getting down to a basic understanding. One Jewish student here, trying to impress Cadoori Rahamim with her limited Hebrew, approached him and cooed the Hebrew word for "handsome" in his ear.

Flashing a smug smile, Rahamim reciprocated with: "Ah, beautiful," which, when strung together with "I love you," all but rounds out his English vocabulary.

"They've lost their childhood, and yet Cadoori will sit there and laugh with them and joke and want to dance for us and make passes at girls," said Harrold, whose sister-in-law died in the Oklahoma City bombing.

"There is still the child in them," she added, "but whenever they start to talk about things, you can just see their faces and see that they have

to move to a different level, to that different person in them."

The bombing in the northern Israeli town of Afula — as remote a target, in many ways, as Oklahoma City — forever changed the lives of Oren, Rahamim and their classmates Tal Peretz, Meital Yona and Shlomi Eliyahu, all 15 years old.

Two years later, the physical scars remain visible. Most of them suffered bad burns that still require pressure bandages. They are plagued by persistent nightmares, and many of them need medication to help them sleep.

Although they continue to carry deep psychological scars, their trip to the United States — the first for each of them — appeared to have provided a measure of catharsis and healing.

"By speaking and expressing myself, it helped me remove some of the weight off my chest," said Peretz, who spent a month and a half in the hospital after the Afula bombing and awaits two more operations.

Peretz ran from the scene of the explosion, his eyes and hair on fire. With third-degree burns over 45 percent of his body, he was brought to the hospital in Afula, where his mother Tamar, an attending nurse, did not recognize him.

Tamar Peretz, who accompanied the Israelis to Oklahoma City, said the trip had helped her son mature and make strides toward greater independence.

During their visit, the Israelis spent time with local Jewish youths, had dinner at the governor's mansion and enjoyed some local color with a horseback ride through a park. But a candlelight memorial service at the small, open-air Heartland Chapel across from the bomb site proved the most difficult part of the trip.

As Horesh stared at the barren land and ruined buildings through a fence lined with crosses, stuffed animals, photographs and notes, she flashed back to that horrible day on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street.

It all came back, she said, in a dizzying flood of black and white images — the explosion, the smell of blood, the burning bodies.

Horesh had missed her bus for school that morning, so she jumped on the No. 5 bus and sat down near the front. She was wearing her good luck charm around her neck that day, and as her fingers played with it, the charm broke free and flew to the back of the bus. Horesh retrieved it there and sat down.

"That's what saved my life," she said.

Horesh emerged from the wreckage uninjured, while all those at the front of the bus died in the explosion.

A year and a half later in Oklahoma City, she said she was puzzled when a reporter asked her why she thought that she survived.

"I didn't know how to answer," she said. "I don't know why I stayed alive and why other people didn't. I'm not the one who can answer it. Only God."

She paused, then added, "Some people say perhaps someday maybe I will do something important with my life."

Judging by the earnest, admiring faces Horesh encountered here, in the heartland of America, that day has already arrived. □

## Tensions high in Lebanon as IDF confronts Hezbollah

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Tensions are once again running high in southern Lebanon.

The Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement launched some 30 rockets at Kiryat Shmona and other northern Israeli communities Saturday night.

The rocket attack came after the Israel Defense Force shelled an area near a Lebanese village in the security zone earlier in the day.

Two Lebanese civilians were reportedly killed in the Israeli shelling.

Israeli gunners responded to the Katyusha attack with an assault on 15 Shi'ite Muslim villages in southern Lebanon, causing hundreds of Lebanese families to flee.

With Hezbollah vowing a series of additional rocket attacks against Israel, top-level diplomats from Israel and the United States held intensive contacts to prevent an escalation of the violence.

At Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Shimon Peres credited the United States with intervening on Israel's behalf and securing a Syrian commitment to calm the situation.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak phoned U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher after the rocket attack to discuss the situation.

The Prime Minister's Office conveyed a message to U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk to convey Israel's apologies for what it said were the unintentional deaths of the civilians.

The northern border has been tense in recent weeks, but Saturday's rocket attack came after a relatively quiet period.

The Katyushas left one Israeli woman lightly injured and caused damage to several buildings.

### Northern Galilee put on alert

Israeli residents in the north had been ordered into shelters earlier Saturday after the region was put on alert in the wake of the day's clashes in southern Lebanon.

An IDF statement confirmed that Israeli troops had opened fire on a group of armed people traveling outside the Lebanese village of Yatar, adding that local media were reporting that the dead were civilians.

After the incident, Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah declared that the fundamentalist group would shell settlements in northern Israel to retaliate.

"I recommend that [Israelis] stay in their shelter today, tomorrow and the day after," Nasrallah said in a statement.

He called the IDF shelling a violation of a U.S.-mediated understanding reached in July 1993 in which Israel and Hezbollah agreed to refrain from attacking civilian targets on either side of the order.

In a statement earlier last weekend, Nasrallah declared that Hezbollah had adopted a new policy of sending suicide bombers to hit Israeli targets, adding that the policy would continue until Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon.

Two weeks ago, an Israeli army officer was killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up near a convoy.

Despite the rise in tensions, Israel's Inner Security Cabinet decided last week that there were no political or military justifications at this time for a massive army action against Hezbollah.

Northern residents were allowed out of shelters Sunday morning, as work to assess the damage got under way.

President Ezer Weizman visited Kiryat Shmona to meet with residents and assess the situation.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu also visited the northern town to survey damage and meet with community leaders.

The attacks came as northern resorts were gearing up for the busy Passover holiday vacation.

Ron Kolakovsky, manager of a resort in the north, said no cancellations had yet been made in the wake of the attacks. □

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Rabbis' stance on gay marriage consistent with Reform policies

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Reform rabbis got home from their annual convention, where they overwhelmingly supported a resolution endorsing gay civil marriage, many found local reporters waiting to interview them and congregants confused about what the resolution actually meant.

"People needed clarity to help them understand the distinction between civil marriage and officiation at a religious ceremony," said Rabbi Elka Abrahamson, who is one-half of a husband-and-wife rabbinic team at Mt. Zion Temple in St. Paul.

"It wasn't clear to our congregants what the resolution endorsed," but the few who did comment "appreciated the favorable resolution," she said.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents about 1,750 Reform rabbis, held its annual convention March 24-28 in Philadelphia.

For the rabbis at the convention, the endorsement of same-sex civil marriage was not particularly controversial because the position is in concert with the Reform movement's stand on the issue over the past two decades.

In fact, most of the discussion at the gathering focused on the implications of performing interfaith marriages.

But the decision comes amid a national debate over the issue, with Hawaii considering whether to legalize same-sex marriage, and conservative groups in 15 states trying to pass laws that would invalidate such marriages.

Because of the timeliness of the issue, newspapers across the country put coverage of the Reform rabbis' resolution on their front pages. Network news broadcasts made it a top story.

"The media attention stunned the conference," Abrahamson said. "People weren't quite ready for it."

But in many Reform congregations, the position was anything but controversial.

"I heard a couple of passing comments, nothing negative," said Rabbi Paul Citrin of Congregation Albert in Albuquerque, N.M.

"People accepted it. The reason there is no extensive reaction is because the conference's position is probably behind where many people in my congregation are" on the issue, Citrin said.

#### 'Not at all radical'

According to Rabbi James Rosenberg of Temple Habonim, in Barrington, R.I., there was no surprise in his Jewish community.

"People in the congregation said they were interested to see that I endorsed gay civil marriage," and that was about it, Rosenberg said. He said he anticipates some discussion among his congregants, however, when he has to explain to them "why it is that a rabbi will not officiate at a mixed marriage but will at a same-sex marriage if both people are Jewish."

"Intellectually, of course, it's perfectly consistent, but emotionally it will create a lot of hard feelings and will take a lot of explaining."

Despite the fevered pitch of media coverage of the issue, the endorsement of gay civil marriage is nothing new for the Reform movement.

"This was a logical step, not at all radical," Abrahamson said. "I would have been stunned had the movement turned its back on the cause it has championed."

In 1977, the CCAR adopted a resolution encourag-

ing legislation to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults. In 1990, the movement adopted a position paper permitting gay and lesbian Jews to be ordained as Reform rabbis. In 1993, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations — the movement's synagogue arm, which represents some 1.3 million temple members — came out in favor of gay and lesbian couples receiving the same benefits as married couples.

And earlier this month, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, which is devoted to social activism and is jointly supported by the lay and rabbinic arms of the movement, endorsed gay civil marriage.

Also not surprising was the strong Orthodox opposition to the position of the Reform rabbis.

A spokesman for Agudath Israel of America, a group representing the fervently Orthodox community, called the position "intolerable."

The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America said it views "with great dismay the current effort to portray homosexual unions as the moral equivalent of heterosexual monogamous relationships, and the suggestion that same-sex marriages constitute a valid 'alternative lifestyle.'"

The Orthodox Union, which represents the centrist Orthodox community, termed gay and lesbian relationships "immoral behavior," and said in its statement that "widespread media coverage of these misguided efforts simply results in the glorification of homosexuality as an acceptable moral behavior."

Although the Reform rabbis' stance on gay civil marriage was an easy one for them, the idea of giving religious sanction to gay and lesbian partnership, through what are usually termed "commitment ceremonies," is more tendentious.

The group's Task Force on Human Sexuality, now entering the third of its three years of study, drafted a preliminary report that outlined the basic elements of a relationship worthy of religious sanction, including truth, family, joy and love.

The task force has not yet formulated any proposed position on the topic of gay and lesbian religious marriage in particular, but is slated to present one to the next convention of the Reform rabbis, in June 1997.

No one knows precisely how many rabbis have officiated at commitment ceremonies, or would, if asked to do so.

But according to Rosenberg of Rhode Island, "the vast majority of CCAR members would be willing to officiate at some kind of commitment ceremony, as long as there is a proper distinction between it and a traditional kiddushin ceremony." □

### West Bank mall being built

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Workers have begun constructing a shopping mall near the West Bank Jewish settlement of Karnei Shomron.

Housing Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said he knew nothing about the project. The Housing and Construction Ministry did not handle the request for building permits, because the shopping center did not involve residential units, Israel Radio reported.

The Palestinians have charged Israel with violating the peace accords by continuing building in the territories.

Local council leaders in the West Bank said all permits for the \$4.5 million project, funded by a Swiss Jew, had been secured.

The council head of Karnei Shomron said the mall would help develop the area, especially with the current freeze on building of housing. □

## Peres proposes referendum on final Palestinian agreement

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres has proposed holding a national referendum before signing a permanent-settlement pact with the Palestinians.

Peres made the surprise announcement Monday in an interview with Army Radio as he was traveling to the Persian Gulf state of Oman. The announcement, which parallels Peres' promise to hold a referendum before signing any peace agreement with Syria, was criticized by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, Peres' opponent in the May 29 national elections.

"I am puzzled by the attempts by Mr. Peres to bypass the real referendum," Netanyahu told Army Radio. "A real referendum is the elections."

Palestinians leaders also criticized the idea, saying that it represented a bad-faith negotiating posture.

The final-status talks with the Palestinians on such issues as Jerusalem and the fate of Jewish settlements are scheduled to begin in May. Israeli officials have said the talks would likely start on time, but that substantive issues would not be addressed until after the Israeli elections.

Peres told reporters traveling with him to Oman that he envisioned a confederacy between Jordan and the Palestinian entity after the negotiations' conclusion.

Peres arrived in Oman on Monday for a two-day state visit aimed at boosting trade between the two countries. He was accompanied by a delegation of leading Israeli industrialists. Although Israel and Oman have no formal diplomatic ties, Peres was received at the airport with a full state ceremony and military band.

During a meeting between Peres and Oman's ruler, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, the two leaders affirmed their commitment to a comprehensive Middle East peace and to developing bilateral relations.

From Oman, Peres is to travel to the Persian Gulf nation of Qatar. Peres' visit to Qatar will be the first by an Israeli prime minister. During his trip, Israel and Qatar are expected to sign a pact to establish low-level economic ties. Israel already has such an agreement with Oman.

A site reportedly has been found in the Omani capital of Muscat for the Israeli economic mission.

In their first economic accord, Qatar and Israel signed an agreement for the sale of natural gas to Israel.

While Peres was in Oman, Israeli officials announced that they would further ease the closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the wake of the recent series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel.

Some 3,000 Palestinians from Gaza who are older than 45 will be able to work at agricultural jobs in southern Israel, Agriculture Minister Ya'akov Tsur said Monday.

Tsur said lists of eligible workers were being drawn up and that they should be able to begin working during the intermediate days of the Passover holiday.

Palestinian officials have complained of shortages and growing unemployment since the closure was imposed in late February.

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, said he favored easing the closure, which he warned could lead to violence in the self-rule areas. □

## Air force launches inquiry into fatal helicopter crash

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli air force has appointed a committee to investigate the cause of a helicopter crash that killed seven soldiers.

The crash occurred Sunday afternoon, after the

helicopter had dropped off three soldiers in the Judean Desert as part of a training exercise.

Seconds after lifting off, the helicopter crashed back to the ground and burst into flames.

The seven killed in the crash were identified as: Maj. Eyal Geller, 33, of Ramat Gan; Capt. Ofer Schwartz, 26, of Rishon le-Zion; Master Sgt. David Weizman, 40, of Kiryat Malachi; Sgt. Guy Shapir, 20, of Kiryat Ono; Cpl. Inbal Tavisi, 20, of Petach Tikva; Cpl. Doron Ezra, 20, of Rishon le-Zion; and Cpl. Liab Filgud, 19, of Carmiel.

Two soldiers who had been sitting in the back of the helicopter were hospitalized for light to moderate injuries.

The committee, appointed by Herzl Bodinger, commander of the Israeli air force, began working immediately after the accident to determine whether the crash was caused by human error or a technical mishap.

There was no flight-data recorder, or "black box," in the helicopter, and the pilot did not make any emergency communications before the crash.

But there were some recorded communications from the flight, which the commission was planning to examine. It will also view pictures taken by one of the soldiers who had been aboard the flight to photograph the exercise. That soldier was killed in the crash.

The Yassur-type helicopter that crashed Sunday has been used by the air force since 1969 and is considered the "backbone" of its cargo helicopters. With its large size and two powerful engines, the helicopter has been used to transport soldiers and equipment, to evacuate wounded, to move heavy objects and to fight fires.

Annual statistics released by the Israel Defense Force last week indicated that 20 soldiers died in accidents in 1995, seven during training exercises. □

## Russia's foreign minister snubs Israeli counterpart

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Russia's foreign minister has reportedly refused to invite his Israeli counterpart for a meeting in Moscow.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak submitted a request two months ago for a meeting with Yevgeny Primakov, who never answered the request, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Monday.

But Primakov invited Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to meet with him in April in the Russian capital.

That move was interpreted by the Israeli Embassy in Moscow as Russia's way of protesting the continuing closure Israel imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after a recent series of Hamas terror bombings in Israel.

Primakov said last week that he had no plans to meet with Barak, adding that he would make do with the conversation they had during the March 13 anti-terror summit in the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Sheik.

The discussion Primakov referred to was a 10-minute hallway conversation with Barak that included Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Ha'aretz reported.

Primakov, the former head of Russia's foreign intelligence service, was appointed foreign minister in January. His appointment signaled a harder foreign policy line than his predecessor, Andrei Kozyrev, embraced.

Diplomatic sources in Moscow were quoted in the Ha'aretz report as describing the Russian foreign minister's refusal to meet with Barak, and the insulting way in which the request was handled, as unprecedented and undiplomatic. The sources said Primakov's behavior toward Barak was intended to underline Moscow's disapproval of Israeli policy. □