



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. and European diplomats are seeking to bring an end to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. But Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Israel would not cease its military operation until Hezbollah stops its rocket assaults on northern Israel. [Page 2]

■ The Jewish state formally opened an interest section in Tunis, making Tunisia the fourth Arab state to establish some form of official ties with Israel. The other countries are Egypt, Morocco and Jordan.

■ Argentina's Supreme Court ordered a full re-examination of the investigation of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy. The court will review conflicting reports on the explosion, which left 29 dead and some 100 wounded. [Page 4]

■ Israel said it would raise to 7,000 the number of workers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to whom it would give entry permits, marking a further easing of the closure on the areas. An additional 10,000 foreign workers also will be allowed into Israel to work in construction.

■ Two Palestinians responsible for significant terrorist attacks against Israelis will attend the Palestine National Council meeting in Gaza. Nayef Hawatmeh, head of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Leila Khaled, a former PFLP hijacker, were not required by Israel to sign a pledge denouncing terrorism and supporting the peace process. [Page 2]

■ An Israeli emissary working at a Jewish school in Budapest was stabbed in his office. The Arab assailant, who wounded Israel Taub in the neck and hand, said he wanted to kill an Israeli because of Israel's military assault in Lebanon.

■ Pope John Paul II hailed a "new spirit of friendship" between Jews and Roman Catholics at a meeting to mark the 10th anniversary of his historic visit to a synagogue in Rome. The pope made his remarks to Rome's chief rabbi and other members of the city's Jewish community during an audience at the Vatican.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Hand of Syria looms behind Hezbollah attacks on Israel

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As American diplomats discreetly went to work this week to patch together a new cease-fire on the Israeli-Lebanese border, one thing clearly emerged: Syria's use of Hezbollah to pressure Israel into peace negotiations with Damascus has not proven effective.

In their quiet, behind-the-scenes moves, the White House and State Department were taking what was for Israel a gratifyingly slow pace.

While Israeli planes, helicopters and artillery continued to pound Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, the Clinton administration made it clear to the rest of the world that this time, Washington stands squarely behind the Israelis.

Even ghastly television footage of Lebanese civilian casualties caused by Israeli fire did not sway the administration from its firm line.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, running Operation Grapes of Wrath with brisk vigor, explained why.

Washington, he said, had tried for weeks, at Israel's urgent request, to persuade Syria to exert restraint on Hezbollah.

But the American diplomacy failed and the Shi'ite fundamentalist organization's sporadic firing of Katyusha rockets on northern Israel persisted.

It was only when policy-makers in Jerusalem and Washington concluded that this avenue was leading nowhere that Peres gave the military the order to act.

The current flare-up reflects, in the view of seasoned observers, a cynical relationship of mutual exploitation between Syria and Hezbollah.

The flare-up occurred, not at all coincidentally, during a suspension in the long and frustrating Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

After the series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel in February and March, Peres pulled his delegates out of the peace talks in Washington.

He has refused to send them back until the government in Damascus condemns the Hamas terror killings and expresses compassion for the innocent victims and their families.

This position is widely supported by the Israeli public.

Hard-nosed political pundits suggest that the suspension of the Israeli-Syrian talks is convenient for Peres in this pre-election period. The prospect of making concessions on the Golan Heights — a key Syrian demand in the negotiations — is controversial, even frightening, for many Israelis, including some in the Labor camp.

It is better, then, from Labor's perspective, for the Israeli-Syrian track to lie fallow in the coming months.

Syria, as so often during the past years of on-again, off-again negotiations, responded by giving the nod to Hezbollah to step up its strikes against Israel.

And Hezbollah gladly obliged: Its escalating pressure on Israel included a March 20 suicide bombing of an Israeli unit in southern Lebanon that killed one Israeli soldier, a March 30 Katyusha attack on the Galilee panhandle and a April 9 Katyusha assault that prompted the massive Israeli air, land and sea operation in Lebanon.

Israeli experts are unanimous in their view that even though Hezbollah is funded and controlled from Tehran, its ability to operate in southern Lebanon is directly determined by Damascus.

At Syrian President Hafez Assad's will, Hezbollah's fanatical gunmen unleash their Katyusha rockets and plant their roadside bombs. And at his command, they can be forced to desist.

Waiting for Syria's green light

Assad believes that painful pinpricks from Hezbollah can push Israel back to the negotiating table — without Syria's having to pay any price, even in the form of a condemnation of the Hamas suicide bombings.

Hezbollah, for its part, is only too pleased to give its gunmen their marching orders whenever a green light from the Syrians is available.

Its basic motivation is rooted in religious fanaticism, which dictates an implacable hatred of "the Zionist entity." But there also are pragmatic

calculations at work. Sensing that sooner or later an Israeli-Syrian deal will be worked out that will provide in part for a complete pacification of the Israeli-Lebanese border, Hezbollah is anxious that its military activism be perceived as a major contributing factor in Israel's eventual withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The organization may well feel, in the view of some experts here, that its future existence as a political force within Lebanon is conditional upon its being able to proclaim itself the liberator of the south from the long Israeli occupation.

Israel does not delude itself into thinking that Operation Grapes of Wrath, however impressive the firepower unleashed, can destroy or even disarm the Hezbollah movement.

The fundamentalism that Hezbollah represents is a potent force within Lebanon's large Shi'ite community, and the supply of hardware from Iran is virtually unstoppable unless Syria makes a strategic decision to stop it.

Such a decision might be possible in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement. But it is not realistically available in the current situation.

Israel's tactics, then, are to hurt Hezbollah while at the same time pressure the Beirut government by creating a massive, though temporary, flight of Lebanese refugees from the Israeli onslaught.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, consumed both politically and personally in the massive task of rebuilding war-ravaged Beirut, could only look on impotently as the dust of explosions mingled with the dust of his vast construction projects.

In a circular and quintessentially Middle Eastern process of vicarious pressure, Hariri's plight will, it is hoped in Israel, persuade the Syrians to pull at Hezbollah's leash.

After Israel's last major military operation in southern Lebanon, in July 1993, the U.S.-brokered cease-fire included an understanding that Israel and Hezbollah would contain their confrontation within Israel's self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon.

The understanding forbade Israel to fire at civilian villages in Lebanon and ruled out Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israel.

The implication was that an infringement by Israel could legitimately provoke a Hezbollah Katyusha attack across the border.

This time, say Peres and his ministers, any understandings that American diplomats eventually work out with all the parties will flatly bar Hezbollah from firing Katyushas across the border under any circumstances.

Israeli officials were confident this week that if U.S. support remained firmly behind Jerusalem, they could obtain these new and improved ground rules. □

U.S. and Europe seek end to latest conflict in Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's continued bombardment of Lebanon and Hezbollah's rocket attacks on northern Israel have prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity.

While American officials continued to stand behind the Israeli military action against the fundamentalist Hezbollah movement, U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk held consultations with Israeli officials for several hours Monday.

Close contacts were reported Monday between Jerusalem and Washington.

French Prime Minister Herve de Charette arrived in Israel on Monday night for talks with Prime Minister

Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Ehud Barak in an effort to secure a cease-fire.

Diplomats with the European Union in Brussels reportedly criticized France for acting alone and termed the French effort an empty gesture that could undermine the European bloc's credibility.

Also in Israel on Monday was British Defense Minister Michael Portillo, who voiced his country's support for the Israeli actions.

"We understand that Israel has worked tirelessly to achieve peace with her neighbors and with the Palestinians," he said, adding, "It is the right of every country to have security and to defend herself."

Jordan's King Hussein criticized Israel's military moves, saying that they were a threat to the Middle East peace process. He said he was dispatching Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Kabariti to Israel to seek an end to the hostilities.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, speaking in Paris on Monday, called on Israel to immediately end the military operation.

At the United Nations, Lebanese envoy Samir Moubarak called Monday for the Security Council to condemn Israel's operation in Lebanon.

The Palestinian envoy to the United Nations, who was taking part Monday in a Security Council debate on Israel's continued closure of the territories, also criticized the Israeli military operation. Terming the closure a "siege of the Palestinian territory," Nasser al-Kidwa condemned the "escalating Israeli aggression against Lebanon."

Peres said Monday that Israel would consider a diplomatic solution, but that the military operation would stop only after the Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israel ceased.

"It's too early to negotiate," he told reporters. □

Leader of rejectionist group to attend PNC meeting in Gaza

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has allowed two Palestinians involved in significant anti-Israel terrorist actions during the 1970s to enter the self-rule areas to attend a meeting of the Palestine National Council slated to take place next week.

Israel granted entry on Monday to Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Damascus-based Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace moves.

Hawatmeh was responsible for the 1974 Ma'alot massacre, when terrorists killed 26 people, most of them schoolchildren, in the northern development town.

Reversing course from a day earlier, Israel also agreed Monday to allow the entry of Leila Khaled, who was captured in London in 1970 after trying to hijack an El Al plane. She was later exchanged for hostages taken in other hijackings.

Israeli authorities are not requiring the two to sign pledges denouncing terrorism and backing the peace process, a condition Israel has demanded from other PNC members seeking to enter the self-rule areas.

The PNC is scheduled to convene April 22, when the Palestinian parliament in exile is expected to tackle the question of revoking the clauses in its charter calling for Israel's destruction.

Khaled, an opponent of the Israeli-Palestinian accords, has promised to vote against any change in the charter. Another rejectionist, George Habash, the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, may be given a permit to enter the autonomy in the coming days, according to Israeli officials. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

War crimes tribunal confronts different conditions from 1945

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — As world Jewry marks Holocaust Remembrance Day this week, the message goes forth that the crimes of the Nazis will not be forgotten.

But 51 years after the end of World War II, the world has experienced a new series of large-scale war crimes, in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

And for the Jewish community, the desire to see those responsible brought to justice is particularly keen.

"We Jews are the conscience of the Shoah," Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, said in a telephone interview. "It's our responsibility to help others. At least we can share the expertise we have gained in 50 years of experience — not just in bringing criminals to justice, but in commemorating [the victims], in helping survivors."

The first international war crimes tribunal to be convened since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War II is attempting to bring the suspected perpetrators of recent war crimes to justice.

But the challenges confronting them are daunting.

The atrocities in question are all too familiar: torture, rape, enslavement, genocide. They are reminiscent of the crimes for which 19 senior Nazi leaders were convicted — 12 of them sentenced to death — in 13 trials in Nuremberg from 1945 to 1946 and for which dozens of other lesser figures were later tried in Nuremberg and Tokyo.

But it is a different world today, and these have been different wars.

Conditions are far removed from those of half a century ago. Images of ravaged bodies, brutalized refugees, mass graves and abused prisoners have been seared into the collective mind of the world via television and the press, but political, logistical and other considerations are making the tribunal's job very difficult.

"There is no question that the models we are facing today are very different," Zuroff said. "It is a tremendous challenge."

One of the challenges is that, unlike after World War II, in neither the former Yugoslavia nor in Rwanda is there a clear victor. There also is not a clearly vanquished people.

And more often than not, the atrocities in question were not committed by invading foreign armies; they were perpetrated by fellow citizens, close neighbors and even one-time friends.

A fragile peace

Konstanty Gebert, a Polish Jewish commentator and journalist who has closely followed the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, noted another difficulty.

In the wake of the Dayton agreement that brokered a fragile peace in the region, "the basic guilty party is still in power. No one wants to see them prosecuted because it will upset the apple cart."

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army commander Ratko Mladic, for example, both have been indicted on genocide charges in the killing of up to 6,000 Muslims in July 1995 in the town of Srebrenica.

They also have been indicted in connection with the siege of Sarajevo and the holding of U.N. peacekeeping troops hostage. Some observers feel that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic also should be indicted.

On March 28, a tribunal prosecutor was quoted as saying that the Belgrade government was "criminal" for sheltering and even rewarding accused war criminals.

Croatian officials also have dragged their feet in cooperating with the tribunal.

"The key question, in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, is political will," Zuroff said. "It always comes down to politics. It's not just a judicial issue. The Dayton accord can say that the perpetrators will be brought to trial — but you are negotiating with them. Is peace to be obtained at all costs? Forgetting justice? We feel that there can be no lasting peace without justice."

Gebert said in a telephone interview from Warsaw that whether it would be possible to carry out a war crimes trial under these circumstances would be the "\$64,000 question."

Based in The Hague, the International War Crimes Tribunal was set up in May 1993 by the U.N. Security Council to prosecute war crimes in former Yugoslavia. Its mandate was extended to cover the genocide in Rwanda.

To date, the tribunal has indicted 57 people in former Yugoslavia, but only three are in custody. Forty-six of the indicted are Serbs, including Karadzic and Mladic.

In Rwanda, where in 1994 nearly 1 million people were killed in 100 days — what Zuroff has referred to as "the fastest genocide in history" — the tribunal has indicted only eight people, though some 60,000 more are being held in local jails under local charges.

No one from either conflict has been brought to trial.

Political ambiguity aside, the sheer physical difficulties in carrying out the tribunal's mandate are daunting.

The Yugoslav tribunal "has been bedeviled by the unrealistic expectations of those who believe that television and press reporting can seamlessly translate into the hard evidence necessary for criminal prosecution," Stefanie Grant, director of program and policy at the New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, stated last year.

There are thousands of allegations on file, and the tribunal's chief prosecutor, Richard Goldstone, must select which cases to investigate, identify and locate witnesses and then interview them "to establish that criminal offenses such as murder, rape, enslavement or deportation took place," Grant said.

Further, the tribunal must also guarantee safe conditions to ensure that witnesses will testify in an eventual trial.

In Rwanda, the hunt for the perpetrators of the genocide and attempts to bring them to justice are made even more difficult by the fact that the country has had to rebuild its judiciary system, among other institutions, after the slaughter. Moreover, many of the people wanted for their part in the genocide are known to be hiding in countries such as Zaire, Cameroon and even Belgium.

'Use Nuremberg as an example'

After spending a career hunting down the perpetrators of the Nazi's Final Solution against Europe's Jews, Zuroff is now serving as an adviser to Rwanda's National Commission on Genocide.

"Our major role is enlisting public opinion to create the political will" to seek out the perpetrators and bring them to trial, he said, adding, "Reconciliation can only be rooted in justice."

Zuroff said he felt that it is extremely important to follow the example of Nuremberg and bring the leaders held responsible for war crimes, and as many perpetrators as possible, to justice.

"At Nuremberg, the political and ideological leadership of the Nazi Party were brought to trial," he said. "They were held accountable. It allowed people to look to the future." □

Quebec to allow stores to sell English-only Passover products

By Bram D. Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — The "Matzahgate" scandal is at an end, at least for now.

A few weeks before Passover, a Quebec government agency attempted to block the sale of kosher for Passover products that did not have labels in French.

After a tense period of accusations of insensitivity and even anti-Semitism leveled against the French Language Office, government officials and Jewish community leaders reached an agreement last week.

Passover matzah and other kosher foods will be allowed to be sold in Quebec stores next year for Passover, even though their English-only labeling contradicts Quebec's language charter, which calls for French to appear on all publicly displayed products.

Many Passover products sold in Quebec are imported from the United States.

The agreement came after a two-hour meeting of officials of the French Language Office, which polices the language legislation, and representatives of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Sephardi community.

"I think we made a constructive small step in sensitizing them to the concerns of our community vis-a-vis this issue," said Jack Jedwab, executive director of the CJC's Quebec region.

Jedwab expressed dismay, however, that the language office had not immediately exempted the kosher products.

The law permits such exemptions for religious reasons.

The ire of the Jewish community here was raised after the language office received a letter from a major food distributor informing it that the labeling of the imported Passover products was illegal.

The letter urged immediate action "because kosher products are on the shelves for a limited time."

Some stores pulled the matzah and other kosher products with English labels from their shelves.

Nicole Rene, president of the French Language Office, said at a news conference after the meeting with Jewish leaders that "the Jewish community was not being targeted."

"It was the importers who were targeted because they were not complying with the law."

Rene announced that a task force made up of CJC and government officials would be formed to work toward a solution that would not require amendments to the French Language Charter.

Reisa Teitelbaum, chair of the CJC's Quebec region, said, "I would like to find a long-term solution so that this doesn't happen again." □

Supreme Court to review probe of 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The Argentine Supreme Court has ordered a full re-evaluation of the investigation of the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy.

Along with plans to recall witnesses and review all the investigative procedures used until now, the court said it would look into conflicting reports on the explosion, which left 29 dead and some 100 wounded.

Three witnesses have reported hearing two almost simultaneous explosions.

However, a dozen others said they only heard one blast.

The court will also look into allegations that the explosives were brought into the embassy disguised as building materials being used to renovate the 70-year-old structure.

So far, investigators have assumed that a car bomb was used.

Unofficially, the court said that Iranian terrorists were suspected of carrying out the attack.

"If that is the case, we'll need help from abroad," a court source said in an interview.

"An investigation of international terrorism exceeds our resources," the source said.

"Unless we get help from foreign intelligence services and international institutions, this bombing might become a perfect crime."

Argentina has come under pressure at home and abroad for its inability to solve the embassy blast and the July 18, 1994, bombing of the Jewish community's headquarters in Buenos Aires that left 86 dead and 300 wounded.

In February, the Argentine government said it was creating a police team to look into the 1994 blast. □

Israeli court denies spy's release

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The High Court of Justice this week refused to release convicted spy Marcus Klingberg, saying that the ailing Israeli could still endanger national security.

The Polish-born Klingberg, 77, has served 12 years of an 18-year sentence for spying for the former Soviet Union.

Klingberg, who has had several strokes recently, had appealed to the court for an early release on account of his poor health.

But the court said Sunday that Klingberg might still remember information that could bring harm to the Jewish state.

Klingberg was arrested and secretly sentenced in 1983.

His case first surfaced in the British media in 1987, and later in German reports.

An Israeli news blackout was lifted in 1993, though details about the case and his capture remain unclear.

According to Israeli reports, Klingberg immigrated to Israel in 1948, and was last seen in January 1983 en route to a scientific convention in Western Europe.

At the time, he was head of a research facility in the center of the country. □

Holocaust martyrs, heroes honored

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The commemoration of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day began this week at Yad Vashem in a state ceremony attended by Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

The theme of this year's commemoration, "Return to Life," celebrates the determination of Holocaust survivors to rehabilitate their lives and to reaffirm their Jewish identity.

On Monday night, the six people who lit the traditional beacons, which represent the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, all took part in major postwar events for Holocaust survivors: the return to their homes, the search for loved ones and the attempt to rebuild their lives.

Shops and businesses closed early Monday night.

Also, special shows devoted to the subject of the Holocaust were aired. □