



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The State Department urged Americans living and traveling abroad to "exercise greater than usual caution" in the wake of a federal court decision to extradite to Israel Musa Abu Marzook, a leader of Hamas. The warning came as Hamas threatened to retaliate against the decision.

■ Hezbollah claimed responsibility for a roadside explosion in the southern Lebanon security zone, which wounded two South Lebanese Army soldiers. Israeli and SLA forces fired on Hezbollah targets in response to the attack.

■ Israeli officials said they would ask the U.N. Security Council to reconsider UNIFIL's mandate when it comes up for renewal in July. The move comes after the United Nations released a report suggesting that Israel intentionally shelled a U.N. base in southern Lebanon last month. [Page 3]

■ Jewish activists in Florida launched a grass-roots campaign to convince Gov. Lawton Chiles to veto legislation that would allow students to lead prayers at high school graduations, sporting events and non-compulsive assemblies.

■ Simcha Dinitz, a former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, was fined roughly \$13,000 after being found guilty of billing the agency for charges on a personal credit card. [Page 3]

■ The governor of the Yaroslavl region of Russia told an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee group that he was determined to find the culprits responsible for the bombing of the local Jewish community center last month. The JDC visited the area to express solidarity in the wake of the attack. [Page 3]

■ American neo-Nazi Gary Lauck went on trial in Hamburg, Germany, accused of inciting racial hatred. The Nebraska-based Lauck is accused of being Germany's chief supplier of neo-Nazi propaganda.

■ The president of the Jewish community in Romania is slated to visit members of Congress in an effort to win a permanent extension for his country's most-favored-nation trade status.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Labor, Likud prod pollsters to gauge views of key groups

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the Israeli election campaign enters its final weeks, the Labor and Likud parties are still unsure how three key groups — Israeli Arabs, Russian immigrants and religious Jews — will vote in the race for prime minister.

Pollsters have provided a mixed picture.

Labor claims its polls show the 4 to 6 percent lead which Prime Minister Shimon Peres has commanded over Likud rival Benjamin Netanyahu since late March is still holding up.

Likud in turn contends its latest polls are showing a dramatic narrowing of the gap to a near neck-and-neck race.

Polls commissioned by two leading Israeli newspapers, meanwhile, provided comfort to both sides.

Yediot Achronot last Friday published two polls, both showing a significant lead for Peres.

But Ma'ariv published a poll showing Netanyahu pulling significantly closer, narrowing the gap to 3 percent.

The discrepancies in the polls, according to independent observers, is driven by the pollsters' ability to accurately gauge political sentiments in three key segments of the population:

- Israeli Arabs, who comprise some 10 percent of the electorate;
- immigrants from the former Soviet Union — another 10 percent;
- and the fervently Orthodox, who comprise some 5 percent of the voters.

Labor officials say the impact on Israeli Arabs of Israel's 16-day Operation Grapes of Wrath is still reverberating.

As a result, the officials say, Arab voters are reluctant at this time to tell pollsters that they will vote for Peres.

When Israeli voters go to the polls May 29, they will for the first time be given two ballots: one for the Peres-Netanyahu race, the other to vote for the party of their choice in separate balloting for the Knesset.

In the past — when there was only one ballot for Knesset representation and the prime minister was selected from the winning party — a majority of Israeli Arabs chose Labor over Likud.

In an effort to woo their votes, Peres has scheduled meetings with top Arab politicians in the coming days. Some of his senior ministers, among them Uzi Baram and Yossi Beilin, spent long hours this week shoring up the support of local Arab leaders.

In the wake of the Israeli shelling of Lebanon, some Israeli Arab leaders called on their community to vote only in the Knesset balloting and to abstain from the prime minister contest.

Arab vote could decide prime minister race

Public opinion polls continue to show that up to 30 percent of Arab voters would not vote for either Peres or Netanyahu.

Political pundits say the size of the turnout in the Arab sector could be crucial to determining who will be Israel's next prime minister.

In recent elections, the Arab turnout has been lower than that in the Jewish community: 65 percent compared to 80 percent.

But Labor believes that once the trauma of Grapes of Wrath fades, the vast majority of Arab voters will support Peres.

The size of the Arab turnout will depend, to an important extent, on the willingness of municipal and family leaders to get out the vote. And that, in turn, could depend on how successful Peres, Baram and Beilin are in persuading the Israeli Arab community's deeply divided political leadership that a continued alliance with Labor is worthwhile.

Arab politicians, both religious and secular, demanded this week that the prime minister commit himself to appointing an Arab minister if he wins the election.

This would mark the first time an Israeli Arab citizen takes a seat at the Cabinet table.

Among Israel's immigrant community, Natan Sharansky's Yisrael

Ba'Aliya Party is doing consistently well at the polls, scoring four or even five seats out of the 120 in the Knesset.

Sharansky has made it clear he would be prepared to join a government under Peres or Netanyahu, indicating that he will angle for the Housing Ministry in the new government.

His foremost interest is to work for his immigrant constituency; his policy positions are centrist enough to enable him to cooperate with either of the major parties.

Immigrant vote difficult to forecast

Labor and Likud, for their parts, are hardly fighting Sharansky in the ballot for Knesset members; both parties seem resigned to seeing a large proportion of the immigrant vote going to Yisrael Ba'Aliya in the balloting for Knesset representation.

Instead, their concern is focused almost totally on how the immigrants from the former Soviet Union will vote in the race for prime minister.

And here, because of the language barrier and the cultural divide, both sides fear that they are not reading immigrant opinion correctly and are not getting their messages across to them.

Labor officials say the olim are broadly satisfied with their absorption into Israel.

While many are not working in their chosen professions, almost all are working in some job, Labor officials say.

Many have purchased their first homes, with massive government assistance.

The opposition, naturally, stresses the areas of dissatisfaction among the immigrants, hoping this will prompt them to cast their votes for Netanyahu.

Both parties wonder whether their pollsters are succeeding in measuring the shifting mood of the immigrant community.

They wonder, too, what percentage of the olim will actually vote on election day — and what proportion will make do with voting for “their” party in the Knesset balloting and forgo casting a ballot for prime minister.

An even more closed community is the fervently Orthodox.

What with their traditional distaste for any process that involves counting Jewish heads, and the fact that the fervently Orthodox rabbis, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, have not yet taken a public position on the Peres-Netanyahu race, the community's replies to the pollsters are bound to be vague, if not downright misleading.

Peres hopes fervently Orthodox will abstain

The question of how these voters will act on election day is also perturbing.

They may receive final instructions from their rabbis to vote for the fervently Orthodox parties in the Knesset balloting and, as the Israeli Arabs threaten to do, ignore the prime ministerial race.

For Peres, that would be a coup: most in the fervently Orthodox community lean to the right politically.

Not surprisingly, Netanyahu and his lieutenants are doing all they can to persuade Orthodox rabbis to call on their followers to cast their votes for him.

Peres also faces an awkward dilemma in appealing to both the Arab and fervently Orthodox voters.

The two groups are on opposite sides of the pole over the sensitive issue of Hebron.

Israeli Arabs want the government to honor its commitment to the Palestinians by carrying out the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron.

Fervently Orthodox leaders are urging Peres to defer the withdrawal until after the election. □

FBI reportedly investigating threat to Muslims in America

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Less than a week after warning American Jews about an anonymous threat to kill Jewish executives and doctors, the FBI is now reportedly investigating letters threatening attacks on mosques and Muslim groups around the United States.

The letters, reportedly mailed from Birmingham, England, purport to come from a branch of the Jewish Defense League-Kahane Chai in Britain.

The Washington, D.C.-based Council on American-Islamic Relations has warned 1,500 mosques and religious institutions in the United States to remain on the lookout for the letters.

The FBI would not comment on the investigation, but Reuters quoted a spokesman as saying, “We do not know if the threat is real.”

A Kahane spokesman told Reuters he had no knowledge of the letter and said it was “a typical Muslim-style provocation to get [Muslims] to sharpen their swords.”

“Those letters are forgeries,” said Mordechai Levy, national director of the New York-based Jewish Defense Organization, a militant group which has called for retaliation against Muslim terrorist groups if they target Jews.

Last week the FBI issued an alert to Jewish groups after it received a threat to carry out attacks on Jewish executives and doctors unless Israel withdrew its military forces from Lebanon and paid \$12 billion in compensation by May 5.

After having one of the letters read to him, Levy said it could not have been written by a Jew. The letter, he said, contained references to the Jewish international banking conspiracy and other anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

“We don't agree with what's in that letter,” Levy said. “We don't support threatening all Muslims, but what I do believe is that we Jews have got to make clear that any terrorist group that lifts a hand to kill Jews will pay. There must be self-defense.”

The letter reportedly stated in part: “Our arm is long and if our people are attacked outside of Israel, we will respond against the Muslim community around the world.

“Be warned Muslims, your lives are to ours like the sheep to the butcher,” it said, adding, “you will be delivered into our hands.”

The back of the letter reportedly contains a copy of a photograph widely published last month of a man running through the streets of Lebanon, carrying his dead son and daughter in his arms. □

Neo-Nazis rally in Moscow

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Members of a neo-Nazi group burned Israeli and American flags during a rally Saturday in the center of Moscow.

The rally, which came amid annual May Day celebrations and attracted about 100 demonstrators, was organized by the Russian National Union, a small but militant ultra-nationalist group.

Some demonstrators carried anti-Semitic signs.

Leaders of the demonstration warmed up the crowd by shouting anti-Zionist and anti-American slogans.

Police did not interfere, saying the rally did not involve large numbers, according to reports on Russian television. □

**Israel questions UNIFIL role
in wake of critical U.N. report***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In the wake of a controversial report on last month's shelling of a United Nations base in southern Lebanon, Israel plans to ask the U.N. Security Council to reconsider UNIFIL's mandate when it comes up for renewal in July.

Israel complained that the U.N. report on the April 18 shelling in Kana, in which at least 91 Lebanese civilians were killed, did not take into account evidence provided by the Israel Defense Force and failed to emphasize the fact that Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel near U.N. positions.

David Peleg, Israel's top diplomat to the United Nations, told Israel Radio, "We have reported to the U.N. 34 cases in which Hezbollah shelled Israel less than 200 meters from a U.N. position.

"The question is, what did UNIFIL do to prevent these attacks, and if they didn't do much, why?" he said, referring to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

U.N. force needs Israeli cooperation

Peleg said the report's findings would cast a new light on the relationship between Israeli forces and the U.N. peacekeeping forces stationed in southern Lebanon.

Such a report, he said "which puts the blame on Israel and suggests that the shelling of Kana base was done deliberately — although it doesn't use these words — will certainly have an impact on the relationship between Israel and UNIFIL."

Some 4,500 U.N. peacekeepers have been stationed in southern Lebanon since 1978. Their mandate is renewed every six months.

Israel has maintained that artillery units were responding to Hezbollah fire from a nearby site, and that map errors resulted in the tragic accident. It has also denied U.N. claims that a pilotless drone was in the area at the time of the shelling.

The report was presented to the U.N. Security Council this week, and Lebanon has asked that actions be taken against Israel in light of the inquiry's findings.

However, Lebanon's efforts to pass a Security Council resolution condemning Israel have apparently garnered little support.

In addition to Israel, both the United States and France have been critical of the report's findings.

Peleg said he doubted the Security Council would issue a condemnation of Israel as a result of the report.

"I think that what is most likely to happen is that after informal consultations, the president of the security council will either make a brief statement, or make some presidential statement on behalf of all the council members which refers generally to the report, without condemning Israel and without referring to the conclusions of the report," he said.

Meanwhile, the UNIFIL spokesman in South Lebanon, Timor Goksel, said without Israeli cooperation, the international peacekeepers would not be able to operate.

Pointing to the logistical fact of where personnel are stationed, Goksel said, "Cooperation is one of the key elements of UNIFIL's existence here."

He also rejected Israeli criticism that the peacekeeping forces were not making efforts to control Hezbollah attacks from near U.N. positions. He said the troops have sacrificed many victims "trying to prevent the area from being used for armed purposes."

Nearby, he added, there is "a Fijian soldier fighting for his life because he went out to stop a Katyusha from being fired." □

**Russian official seeks justice
for culprits of attack on center***By Lev Krichevsky*

YAROSLAVL, Russia (JTA) — The governor of the Yaroslavl region of Russia says he is determined to bring to justice the culprits responsible for last month's bombing of the Jewish community center here.

"We already know who committed this crime and will make public the results of the investigation in the immediate future," Alexander Lisitsyn told members of a visiting American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee delegation this week.

The JDC delegation came to Yaroslavl to express solidarity with the Jewish community here in the wake of the April 19 attack, which caused thousands of dollars of damage to the community's central Jewish facility.

The governor also expressed regret over the incident, saying that it was unfortunate that some people in Russia still subscribe to the ideas of Nazism.

Following the bombing, the Jews of Yaroslavl joined hands to rebuild the damaged building.

Nadezhda Nosova, director of the Jewish community center, said dozens of Jews have donated a total of \$1,000 toward the restoration of the center.

"People are bringing \$10 to \$50 each, though most of them are not well-to-do," said Nosova.

Asher Ostrin, head of the JDC operations in the former Soviet Union, said the incident had served to unify the local Jewish community. "I think the incident has made them more dedicated to continue going," Ostrin said.

The Jews here, meanwhile, are still reeling from the incident. "It happened so suddenly. I got frightened the Sunday school would never be open again," said Julia Krylova, a 7-year-old student.

"I couldn't believe the synagogue was blasted," said Ephraim Levin, 71, a retired engineer.

"This is my second home. I remember my father coming to this synagogue before it was closed by the authorities in the 30s," he said. Levin's grandparents were among the first Jews who settled here in the 1880's.

"I mostly regret that local non-Jewish intelligentsia haven't publicly expressed their attitude toward the bombing," said Alexander Ruthman, a publisher.

"They are terribly wrong when thinking the incident does not affect them directly."

Pinchas Goldschmidt, the chief rabbi of Moscow, told the governor that the Jewish community of Russia was deeply concerned about such incidents. He asked that Yaroslavl authorities provide some extra security measures for the city's Jewish institutions. He said he has made similar requests of federal and Moscow authorities. □

Dinitz may appeal \$13,000 fine*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Former Jewish Agency for Israel chairman Simcha Dinitz has been fined approximately \$13,000 after being found guilty of billing the agency for charges on a personal credit card.

In announcing the fine, a Jerusalem district court judge stressed the seriousness of the offenses, which were fraud and breach of trust. At the same time, he rejected the prosecution's request for a prison term. Dinitz said after the sentencing that he was considering appealing the fine.

A former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Dinitz assumed his agency post in December 1987.

He was forced to take a leave of absence from the agency in February 1994 amid allegations that he had charged thousands of dollars of personal expenses to the agency. Dinitz resigned in January 1995. □

Ohio Supreme Court to rule on protests at Demjanjuk home*By Marcy Oster**Cleveland Jewish News*

CLEVELAND (JTA) — While accused Nazi war criminal John Demjanjuk no longer captures headlines, legal maneuvering surrounding his case continues at both the state and federal levels.

The Ohio Supreme Court heard oral arguments May 1 in the case of Seven Hills vs. Aryan Nations that concerns limits imposed on protesters outside Demjanjuk's home.

The American Civil Liberties Union is seeking to lift a permanent injunction by a local judge banning simultaneous protesting by groups with opposing viewpoints in front of Demjanjuk's home in the western Cleveland suburb of Seven Hills.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Justice Department is seeking to deport Demjanjuk because he lied about his Nazi past when he immigrated to the United States in 1958.

The state case originated when the city of Seven Hills, anticipating Demjanjuk's return to his home after seven years in an Israeli prison, enacted a total ban on residential picketing.

Demjanjuk returned to the area in September 1993 after Israel's Supreme Court acquitted him on charges that he was the notorious Treblinka guard "Ivan the Terrible."

But the court also found compelling evidence that Demjanjuk was a guard at the Sobibor death camp and other Nazi concentration camps.

Protesters in front of his home at that time included area Holocaust survivors and their supporters, led by New York Rabbi Avi Weiss, national president of Coalition for Jewish Concerns-AMCHA.

Other demonstrators, who supported Demjanjuk's claims of innocence, included local members of the white supremacist Aryan Nations and Ku Klux Klan organizations, and members of the Ukrainian community.

On Dec. 15, 1993, Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Judge Daniel Gaul struck down the city's ban, but issued an injunction barring groups with opposing viewpoints from demonstrating at the same time. Both sides appealed and, on Feb. 16, 1994, the court of appeals upheld Gaul's decision to strike down the city ordinance and retained his ban on simultaneous protesting.

ACLU claims ban violates First Amendment

The Ohio Supreme Court accepted the case for review last July.

For the ACLU the simultaneous protest ban limits speech in a way that is contrary to the First Amendment.

"It is important to have people out there to bear witness," said Christine Link, executive director of the ACLU of Ohio. "You don't want to have one side out there at a time in a vacuum."

Until last week there had been no protests in front of the Demjanjuk home since 1994, according to the Seven Hills police department. A protest marking the first anniversary of Demjanjuk's return, led by Weiss, took place on Sept. 22, 1994.

Zev Harel, president of Kol Israel, an organization comprised mainly of Holocaust survivors, said his group stopped demonstrating in front of the Demjanjuk home when no one but survivors came to protest.

Weiss returned to Cleveland on May 2 to lead a protest of local Jewish day school children at Demjanjuk's home.

Link says that the seven-member court, which is an elected body, will either release its decision right before or sometime after November elections.

Weiss also led a group of survivors demonstrating last week outside the federal court house in Cleveland.

The survivor community has been discouraged by the slow pace of the legal process in reopening the denaturalization proceedings against Demjanjuk, said Harel.

Although Demjanjuk was stripped of his citizenship in 1981 and extradited to Israel in 1986, the Cincinnati-based Sixth Circuit Court did not interfere with his return to Cleveland in 1993 so that he might assist his attorneys in an investigation of misconduct on the part of the prosecution.

At the time, the U.S. Justice Department filed a motion with presiding Judge Frank Battisti to reopen denaturalization proceedings.

Since Battisti's death in October 1994, the Demjanjuk case has been reassigned twice. It is now in the hands of Judge Paul Matia.

The judge has scheduled a status hearing on the case May 14 to set the deadline for briefs and court dates.

"Demjanjuk was allowed back into this country pending a decision on whether he would be deported for having lied about this Nazi background on his immigration application," Weiss said. "It's been almost three years and nothing has happened." □

France downplays Hezbollah role in distribution of its aid*By Lee Yanowitch*

PARIS (JTA) — The French government has acknowledged that humanitarian aid it sent to the Lebanese government for civilians in the south was partly distributed by Iranian-backed Hezbollah fundamentalists.

But France sought to ease Israeli concerns after statements by a junior minister last weekend appeared to imply that France had been sending the food, medicine and blankets directly to Hezbollah.

Israel and the United States oppose the distribution of relief supplies by Hezbollah because its charitable efforts help rally support for the militant fundamentalists among the local population.

The flap began when the French minister for emergency humanitarian action, Xavier Emmanuelli, said during a tour of southern Lebanon that he knew French aid was being passed on to Hezbollah.

"There are a lot of charitable associations in Lebanon. Hezbollah participates in this charitable action, in medical rescue and social welfare. There is no reason to exclude them," Emmanuelli told reporters.

The statement created a stir in the Israeli media, and the government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres immediately asked Paris for an explanation.

French officials played down the significance of Emmanuelli's remarks. He "was not thinking of anything besides recognizing that Hezbollah can be involved in charitable activities," a French Foreign Ministry spokesman said at a news briefing this week.

"But this changes nothing in France's attitude which, I insist, is that Hezbollah must scrupulously respect the April 26 cease-fire accord ending the cycle of violence" in southern Lebanon, he added.

The Israeli Embassy in France said it was satisfied with the French government's explanation. "For us the question was, 'Is France helping Hezbollah?' And the answer is no," said embassy spokesman Daniel Sa'ada.

France closely aligned itself with Lebanon in seeking a solution to the 16 days of cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel repeatedly spurned the overtures of France and other countries to end the fighting. The United States brokered a cease-fire late last month. □