



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak expressed optimism about the peace process after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Cairo. "I understand his conceptions and I have great hopes that the peace process will continue," Mubarak said. [Page 3]

■ The House version of welfare reform legislation, which passed 256-170, bars thousands of Jewish refugees and immigrants from receiving Medicaid, Aid for Families With Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income and food stamps. Jewish activists are not optimistic the Senate will remove these provisions.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy conveyed condolences to the United States for the victims of the TWA airliner that exploded and crashed off the New York coast. Federal safety and anti-terrorism experts launched parallel investigations, warning against jumping to premature conclusions.

■ U.S. envoy Dennis Ross is scheduled to travel to the Middle East next week to advance the peace process. Ross is set to meet with leaders of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian Authority.

■ German security officials examined the remains of two Israeli soldiers that are set to be swapped for about 200 Shi'ite Muslim prisoners held by Israel. The German officials have been negotiating for the exchange with Hezbollah.

■ Jewish officials renewed calls on the U.S. military to root out racism and bigotry in its ranks in the wake of the daubing of swastikas on barracks where black U.S. Army special forces troops live at Fort Bragg, N.C. In a related incident, the Army and Marine Corps rejected four recruits after they attended their high school graduation wearing gowns bearing symbols of hatred. [Page 3]

■ Canada filed documents against Wasily Bogutin, accusing him of not revealing his World War II activity when he first came to that country. Bogutin is suspected of taking part in the execution of civilians in Nazi-occupied Ukraine.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Conflict over street closing looms as first coalition crisis

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nearly faced its first coalition crisis this week — because of a 660-yard stretch of street.

Of course, more was at issue than the street, and in the struggle to secure a victory on that larger issue, Israeli was pitted against Israeli in a fight that involved stone-throwers, a convoy of cars and billy-club wielding mounted police.

For the more than 5,000 fervently Orthodox residents of neighborhoods straddling Bar Ilan Street, nothing less was at stake in the dispute than the Jewish character of the city — and country — in which they live.

For the secular Israelis who joined a convoy of automobiles to drive along Bar Ilan on the Sabbath, at stake was the ability to enjoy full freedom in the Jewish state — including freedom from religious observance.

Bar Ilan Street — named after Meir (Berlin) Bar-Ilan, one of the leaders of Hamizrachi religious federation in the early days of the state — has for years been the object of campaigns by the fervently Orthodox community, which sought to stop traffic from winding through their neighborhoods on the Sabbath.

But with Netanyahu's recent electoral victory — and the presence of three religious parties in his governing coalition — the haredim, as the fervently Orthodox are known in Israel, saw the chance to win their campaign.

Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy, who is a member of the National Religious Party, last Friday adopted a compromise previously recommended by a public committee that gave the haredim much of what they wanted.

The Sturm Committee, named after its chairman, Elazar Sturm, was a committee formed under the previous, Labor-led government.

It included Israelis from across the religious spectrum, including non-observant Jews.

The committee recognized that given the diverse nature of Jerusalem's 410,000 residents, of which the fervently Orthodox represent about 30 percent, the only way to deal with the issue was through compromise.

As a result, the Sturm Committee recommended closing Bar Ilan Street on the Sabbath and religious holidays, but only during times of prayer services.

The recommendation was not put into effect when it was issued before the new government took office.

Olmert caught by surprise

Levy's decision was made so quickly that Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, who joined Netanyahu on his trip last week to the United States, expressed surprise in New York that it was made without consulting him beforehand.

Once back in Israel, Olmert implied that he supported the recommendations of the Sturm Committee, which he had appointed.

Netanyahu — pointedly — was careful to avoid the issue.

The haredi community smelled victory after Levy issued the order last week, but then the High Court of Justice stepped in.

Responding to appeals made by representatives of the Labor Party, the high court issued an interim order that left Bar Ilan Street open for 15 days until the government could provide reasons why the street should not remain open.

The fervently Orthodox community began protesting last Friday night and returned to confront Sabbath traffic the next day.

Followers of the secularist Meretz Party joined in a convoy of cars to drive along Bar Ilan to demonstrate their right to drive wherever they wanted, on whatever day they liked.

As Saturday wore on, the confrontation turned ugly.

Thousands of fervently Orthodox demonstrators gathered along the road, a major thoroughfare that runs down the hill from the entrance to

Jerusalem toward the northern neighborhoods of Ramot Sharet and French Hill.

They shouted "Shabbos, Shabbos" at the passing cars, reminding their drivers that they were desecrating the Sabbath.

They threw stones, soiled diapers and other garbage at police guarding the street.

By Saturday night, police resorted to force, chasing stone-throwers along the adjacent roads and using their clubs against those who showed any resistance.

According to witnesses, the police entered apartments to apprehend religious protesters.

Local residents complained that police had used force even against women and children.

Knesset member Avraham Ravitz, referring to the day as "Black Sabbath," described the police actions as a "pogrom."

Ravitz — a member of the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc — threatened to quit the governing coalition unless Jerusalem Police Chief Aryeh Amit was fired.

Ravitz later backed away from the threat.

But he had already made it clear that the issues involved could threaten the stability of the nascent Netanyahu government.

Amit, in turn, insisted that his police had done the minimum to keep the situation from getting out of hand. He received the support of Police Chief Assaf Hefetz and, at the top of the chain of command, from Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani.

Tempers cooled after the weekend, but each side made it clear that it would return to the fray with the return of the Sabbath.

During the week, both sides also made it known that they were not about to abandon their principles.

Yossi Sarid, chairman of Meretz, warned non-observant Israelis of the danger of remaining on the sidelines.

"If secular indifference continues," he said, "secular people will no longer be able to live in Jerusalem."

Meretz activists pointed to several practical reasons for their stance.

Bar Ilan is a major traffic artery, they argued; it is the only direct link between the entrance to the capital and its northern neighborhoods, and it is the fastest way for ambulances to reach Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus.

But the main argument of the secularists was that the religious community would not stop with the closure of Bar Ilan.

Indeed, some haredi spokesmen were already declaring that they were also seeking to close a road linking Ramot to Pisgat Ze'ev and French Hill.

They were also talking of closing more streets in the predominantly religious town of Bnai Brak.

Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, a haredi activist, put the matter bluntly, saying that his community did not recognize the authority of the High Court of Justice, but would only rely on decisions made by the Eida Haredit, the rabbinical governing body of the fervently Orthodox community.

Unlike the secular and haredi activists, who spoke in terms of a culture war, others tended to play down the conflict.

Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau pointed to precedents in which roads were being closed down near synagogues on Saturdays.

This was the case on Keren Hayesod Street in Jerusalem, on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv and in many other places in Israel.

Sturm, the chairman of the public committee that issued the original recommendation and himself a secular

Jew, warned in an interview that secularists had little choice but to compromise with the haredim.

"Sooner or later there will be a haredi majority in this city," he said. "Unless the secular Jews develop models of compromise with the haredim, they will be faced with the haredim enforcing their will on the secular population once they are in power." □

Germans claim Israel nixed deal to free Munich hostages

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — German Television has reported that then-Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir rejected a proposal for the release of Israeli athletes taken hostage by Palestinian terrorists during the 1972 Munich Olympics.

Eleven Israeli athletes were murdered during the Munich Games after Palestinians from the Black September group raided their rooms and took them hostage.

Two athletes were shot by members of the group, and nine others were killed in the exchange of fire between the terrorists and German forces during a failed rescue attempt.

Israeli media Tuesday cited the television report, which said the German interior minister at the time had reached an agreement with the government of Egypt and the captors that the terrorists and hostages would be flown to Egypt.

From there, the Israeli athletes were to be allowed to return home, and the terrorists would be released and not face any punishment.

According to the report, then-German Chancellor Willy Brandt ordered the rescue attempt only after Meir rejected any compromise proposal.

Among the people interviewed in the report was the sole Palestinian gunman who was not killed in the exchange with German forces.

Meanwhile, Zvi Zamir, who at the time headed the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, rejected the report's assertion.

Zamir was also sharply critical of the German response to the hostage-taking, saying that Germany's primary interest at the time "had been to make sure the Olympic Games continue as usual."

Zamir said that because of a German law barring the use of federal German security forces in Bavaria, border police officers had been assigned to carry out the rescue attempt despite their lack of adequate training. □

Israel releases Lebanese journalist

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court has released a Lebanese journalist who was arrested last month in the security zone and brought to Israel after being accused of helping Hezbollah plan and carry out attacks on Israeli forces.

The journalist, Ali Daya, 40, was abruptly allowed to return to his home in southern Lebanon on Thursday, a day after the Acre Magistrates Court had extended his detention by six days.

Daya, a Shi'ite Muslim, is a part-time reporter for the Agence France-Presse news agency.

France criticized Israel for his arrest, saying that it was an assault on press freedom.

It remained unclear why Daya was suddenly released.

It was reported earlier this week that the prosecution had encountered difficulty gathering witnesses and evidence against him. □

Mubarak hopeful about peace after meeting with Netanyahu

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak emerged from their meeting Thursday with a round of optimistic comments about the course of the regional peace process.

"I can tell you now that I am very relaxed," Mubarak told reporters at a joint news conference with the Israeli leader.

"I understand his conceptions and I have great hopes that the peace process will continue."

On his first official visit to Egypt since winning Israel's national elections in May, Netanyahu said he had assured Mubarak that he planned to continue the peace process and honor the agreements Israel had already signed under the former Labor-led government.

"We believe that the peace process should be based on the idea of fulfilling existing commitments," Netanyahu told reporters.

He added, "We want to expand the circle of peace."

During their meeting, Netanyahu told Mubarak that Foreign Minister David Levy would meet next week with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

He also said he intended to ease the closure of the territories, allowing an additional 10,000 Palestinian workers into Israel and increasing the number of trucks and ambulances allowed into Israel from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

There has been some easing of the closure in recent weeks to allow some 25,000 Palestinians to enter Israel for work.

In his statement to reporters, Mubarak reiterated the Arab demand that negotiations remain based on the land-for-peace principle and that the final-status negotiations with the Palestinians continue.

Helicopter ride

"It would be a waste of time and effort to try to renegotiate agreements which have already been signed," he said at the news conference.

"And whatever agreements are reached must be in accordance with U.N. resolutions [for the withdrawal from occupied Arab territories] and the political rights of Palestinians."

The Egyptian president adopted a softer stance when he met separately with members of the Israeli media.

"I personally heard Netanyahu's speeches in the Knesset and Congress and press conferences," Mubarak said.

"I couldn't understand how we could proceed forward, if what he was saying is definitely going to happen.

"But I thought, 'Maybe he has another concept, which was not mentioned.' I met him today, and I had a clear picture, that he is ready to negotiate, here and there, which may give some kind of relaxation" to the climate of future negotiations.

Before leaving Egypt, the Israeli premier did not miss an opportunity for relaxation of another kind — requesting a quick helicopter ride over the pyramids in Giza.

A day earlier, Netanyahu held a surprise meeting in Tel Aviv with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Kabriti.

After that session, too, the two leaders said their talks had taken place in a positive atmosphere.

Netanyahu is scheduled to hold talks in Amman, Jordan, later this month with King Hussein. □

Swastikas at Fort Bragg raise concerns about racism in Army

By Anne Miller

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish officials have stepped up calls on the U.S. military to root out racism and bigotry in its ranks in the wake of another incident at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Red swastikas were painted on eight doors inside one of the barracks early Tuesday morning, the latest incident in a series of hate crimes on or near the Army base.

Military authorities need "to pursue, in a vigorous and decisive manner," an investigation to determine and punish the culprits of the vandalism, said Samuel Kaplan, director of the Anti-Defamation League's North Carolina/Virginia office.

Black soldiers, members of the 7th Special Forces Group, who are also known as Green Berets, lived behind six of the vandalized doors. The other two rooms were vacant, officials said.

"Individuals who harbor these animosities," said Kaplan, "need to understand that there are consequences for their actions."

In December, three white soldiers were charged in connection with the slaying of two black Fayetteville, N.C., residents. In January, five soldiers were caught posing for a photograph in the barracks with racist attire and a Nazi flag.

"The Army has a responsibility to rule out any type of hate in its community," said Arthur Berger, director of public relations at the American Jewish Committee. "Swastikas don't just appear on doors."

'Zero tolerance'

President Clinton expressed outrage Wednesday about the incident.

"No one in America should be subject to such vile acts," Clinton said. "We intend to punish those who are responsible. We have a zero tolerance for racism in our military and, make no mistake, we intend to apply it."

A Pentagon report released in March concluded that the influence of hate groups and other extremists in the U.S. Army is minimal. The report, commissioned after the killing of the Fayetteville couple, "found no widespread or organized extremist activity in the Army."

But the Pentagon task force that wrote the report "did identify instances of individuals or small, informal groups of individuals who hold extremist views."

U.S. Defense Department officials were quick to condemn this week's swastika incident.

"The hate artwork is completely unacceptable. There's no room for it in the U.S. military," said Defense Department spokesman Ken Bacon. He promised that the Army would do its best to "find who did this" and "work with members of the services to make sure that such hateful and insensitive activities don't occur again."

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said he plans to protest the military law that allows non-active members of hate groups to enlist and that bars only active members.

"I think that would help the Army in finding out where the trouble is coming from," Hier said.

In a related incident, the Army and Marine Corps recently rejected four enlistees after they attended their high school graduation wearing gowns bearing symbols of hatred.

The ADL lauded the rejection as sending a "message to all young Americans who are considering a career in the Armed Forces: Racism and bigotry are incompatible with military service." □

Israel Experience CEO poised to boost level of participation

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — “Why did you decide to come to Israel?” Joel Schindler asks a group of shorts-clad American teens who have just arrived in Israel on a United Synagogue Youth summer program.

From the answers, it is evident that these 16- and 17-year-old Americans caught the “Israel bug” from their participation in Jewish youth groups, summer camps and day schools, and from their own friends and family members.

“My whole day-school class is in Israel this summer, so how could I stay home?” says a girl from New Jersey.

“My brother and sister went on a Young Judea trip and raved about Israel, and I didn’t want to miss the experience,” adds a young New Yorker.

For Schindler, the newly appointed CEO of Israel Experience Inc., a recently launched consortium dedicated to promoting Israel-based youth programs, these responses only reinforce what studies have already shown:

- That youths with strong ties to the Jewish community are more apt to participate in Israel Experience programs than their unaffiliated counterparts.
- That such programs tend to strengthen Jewish identity and to discourage assimilation.

The challenge, Schindler says, is to attract the estimated 200,000 American Jewish teens whose ties to the community are negligible at best.

Schindler is head of the consortium — made up of the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Agency/World Zionist Organization and the Charles R. Bronfman Foundation — that earlier this year replaced the American Zionist Youth Foundation as the central address for Israel youth programs.

Schindler hopes to double, perhaps even triple, the number of American teens who now participate in Israel Experience programs.

Enter Schindler

But accomplishing this will not be easy. Annually, only 2 percent of the 255,000 Jewish teen-agers in the United States participate in Israel-based programs.

Each year, about 6,000 Americans, ages 14 to 17, visit Israel during the summer, while another 4,000 study, work and tour for longer periods.

While the rate of assimilation and intermarriage has soared during the past decade, the number of young visitors to Israel has remained virtually unchanged.

David Harman, director general of the Jewish Agency/WZO’s Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, is confident that the consortium can significantly boost participation.

“Everyone involved in this new undertaking believes that the potential for these trips is much greater,” he said.

“The problem is that they haven’t been marketed properly.”

This is where Schindler comes in.

Charles Bronfman, the consortium’s chairman of the board, says, “Schindler was the search committee’s unanimous choice, both for his marketing sense and the fact that personally he is so taken with Israel Experience programs because he is a product of them. We believe that he can go to a city and help get people to unite behind the cause.”

Although Schindler, a biologist-turned-marketing executive who has clients inside and outside the Jewish community, will not assume his consortium post until

September, his passion for Jewish youth programs is evident from his background.

Raised in upstate New York, Schindler became actively involved in Young Judea as a teen-ager, eventually serving as its treasurer.

After attending the movement’s summer camps, Schindler spent a year in Israel on Young Judea Year Course, an experience that he describes as “life transforming.”

He stayed on in Israel to attend the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in biology and a master’s degree in biochemistry, after which he returned to the United States for doctoral study.

“My experience has taught me what the Land of Israel is all about and why it is so important to the future of the Jewish people,” he says.

“I come to my own Jewishness through an intense passion for Israel.”

Despite his success in the private sector, Schindler says he accepted the consortium post “because I don’t believe there’s anything more important on the American Jewish agenda than getting young kids to Israel.”

“More than half of our kids marry outside the Jewish people,” he says.

“If we want to ensure the survival of our people, we must instill in youth the desire to remain connected. That’s where Israel Experience programs can make the difference.”

Armed with an annual budget of \$2 million for at least the next two years, with up to \$10 million available for the next five years, Schindler hopes to involve not only youth movements, which traditionally attract the most teens to Israel programs, but local federations and synagogues as well.

May work in Tulsa, not in Phoenix

Sounding every bit the marketing expert, Schindler says, “We need this to be a consumer-based process. We want to ask the communities what they want Israel programs to look like.

“What will best serve Tulsa or Minneapolis may not work in Boston or Phoenix.”

For example, “some communities are linked with communities in Israel through Partnership 2,000, and they might want to send some of their young people to Israel to help the underprivileged,” he says, referring to a UJA program that links American communities and Israeli regions.

“Such a program might be integrated into the day school or Hebrew school curriculum. Kids from Reform, Conservative and Orthodox backgrounds would all be attracted, and this could serve as a way to bridge religious gaps within the community.”

Schindler stresses that the consortium has no immediate plans to create new Israel programs.

“We don’t want to be program providers,” he says. “We want to be program enlargers.

“What’s out there is good. The challenge is to attract more kids.”

Before this can be accomplished, he says, local communities will have to allocate additional resources, both financial and personal, in the fight to keep teens identifiably Jewish.

“We need to compel communities to invest in their own youth for the sake of their own futures,” Schindler says.

“We need to recognize that the initial problem is one of awareness and relative importance. Jewish continuity is not yet a high enough priority for many communities across the United States.” □