



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Two Israeli soldiers were laid to rest after Hezbollah fundamentalists returned their remains to Israel 10 years after they were killed in Lebanon. A Hezbollah leader promised to help obtain information about Israeli air force navigator Ron Arad. [Page 2]

■ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy scheduled a meeting with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for Tuesday. The meeting will be the highest exchange with the Palestinian Authority since Israel elected a new government in May. [Page 3]

■ A U.S. federal appeals court ruled that the city of Beverly Hills violated the First Amendment of the Constitution by allowing Chabad to erect a menorah in a public park while prohibiting other groups from displaying their own symbols in the same park. The court found that Beverly Hills had shown favoritism toward Chabad of California.

■ The CIA asked Israel to check the Athens-New York passenger list of the TWA plane that later crashed on its way to Paris for people with links to terror groups, an Israeli newspaper reported. Another Israeli newspaper had earlier quoted an unidentified senior security source as saying that Israel was helping U.S. intelligence agencies and the FBI in the investigation.

■ A Lebanese-born Palestinian was convicted in a U.S. federal court of the 1985 hijacking of an Egypt Air jet in which 58 people died. Omar Mohammed Ali Rezaq, who testified in his own defense, had said he had been programmed to kill Israelis and their American supporters.

■ Israel's High Court of Justice issued a temporary injunction that freezes Israeli President Ezer Weizman's pardon of two female Palestinian prisoners. [Page 2]

■ The Knesset House Committee decided to lift the parliamentary immunity of Agriculture and Environment Minister Rafael Eitan so that he could stand trial. Eitan had asked for his immunity to be lifted so that he could respond to allegations of illegally using an army document.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Survey: Most Americans favor clergy speaking out on politics

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In contrast to the majority view a generation ago, most Americans now want to see churches speaking out on political and social issues, according to a new nationwide survey of religious identity and political opinion.

The change in attitudes reflects the growing role of religion in how Americans think about politics, the Pew Research Center for People & the Press said in a report on the survey, which was funded by the Pew Charitable Trust.

The poll was based on telephone interviews with 1,975 adults in early June and on interviews conducted between 1994 and 1995.

Fully 54 percent of those polled said churches should "express their views on day-to-day social and political questions," while 43 percent preferred that churches "keep out of political matters."

That constitutes a reversal from opinion held in 1968, when only 40 percent of Americans surveyed by the Gallup polling organization said churches should express political views.

While some observers see the change as evidence of a blurring of the line between church and state, it is not something that troubles Jewish institutions. In their sermons, religious leaders point out, rabbis frequently provide a moral perspective on a variety of issues facing society.

"I think it is only for the good of society if people of conscience are involved in political debates," said Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, director of the Middle Atlantic Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Most clergy members, however, draw the line at endorsing a specific candidate or party, or specific ballot initiatives. Moreover, the Internal Revenue Service requires that religious institutions draw that line in order to maintain their tax-exempt status.

When asked whether "it is ever right for clergymen to discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit," 66 percent said no in the Pew poll, compared with 68 percent in a 1965 Gallup survey. Twenty-nine percent said yes in the current poll, up from 22 percent in 1965.

Only one of 14 people polled said a religious leader or group urged them to vote a particular way in the 1994 elections.

And only one of seven said information on candidates or parties was made available in their place of worship before the election.

Among people who attended religious services at least once or twice a month, about one in five said a clergy member spoke out on candidates and elections, and 78 percent of those saw that as a good thing.

Black Christians proved most likely to hear a political sermon (47 percent), followed by white evangelical Protestants (20 percent), white Catholics (12 percent) and white mainline Protestants (12 percent). Statistics for Jews were not available.

Despite the support for politicking from the pulpit, evidence suggests that most Americans remain skeptical of their religious leaders' advice.

'A moral compass'

Only 7 percent of those polled by Gallup in 1995 said their own religious leaders were most likely to influence their views. Three out of four said they instead looked either to the media or to family and friends for guidance in public affairs.

That does not mean religion still cannot help shape people's views, religious leaders emphasized.

"I think most people want religion to speak to issues that they're confronting," said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

Landsberg of the UAHC agreed. "It's almost expected that rabbis provide some kind of moral commentary to what's happening on the front page of the paper," she said. "I think that the synagogue is viewed as a moral compass in a lot of the political discussions and debates of the day."

Meanwhile, the Pew poll found that white evangelical Protestants have emerged as one of the most powerful voting blocs in the country.

Twenty-three percent of Americans currently describe themselves as white evangelical, or born-again, Protestants, according to the survey.

That places them on a par with white Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants.

Only 7 percent of those polled, however, described themselves as members of the "religious right."

The number of white evangelical Protestants has been steadily rising in recent years, up from 19 percent in 1987 and 16 percent in 1978.

While there is diversity among those who identify themselves as white evangelical Protestants, as a whole they proved more consistently conservative, more Republican and more anti-Clinton than any other major religious group, the poll found.

It also said committed evangelicals are among the most politically active citizens in the country.

"The conservatism of white evangelical Protestants is clearly the most powerful religious force in politics today," the Pew Research Center said in its report on the survey.

Jewish Americans, by contrast, are among the most Democratic and liberal-leaning of all religious groups, second only to black Christians, the poll said.

In comparison to other religious groups, Jews were far more likely to approve of President Clinton and disapprove of the Republican Congress.

And on social issues, Jews proved more likely to hold traditionally liberal views, such as maintaining environmental protections, increasing government assistance to the poor and supporting gay rights.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

That margin is larger for subgroups. □

Soldiers buried in Jewish state after militants give back remains

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The bodies of two Israeli soldiers that were returned from Lebanon to the Jewish state have been laid to rest.

The bodies were recovered as part of an exchange deal with the fundamentalist Hezbollah movement.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israel Defense Force chief of staff and other public figures took part in Monday's funeral of Yosef Fink in his hometown of Ra'anana.

The second soldier, Rachamim Alsheikh, was buried at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem.

In eulogizing Fink, a sergeant who was kidnapped in Lebanon 10 years ago, Netanyahu said Israel was unified in mourning the loss.

"We will not forget that Yosef and Rachamim fell serving their country," the prime minister said, adding, "Thanks to them, we exist."

In Beirut, the leader of Hezbollah pledged to help search for four additional Israeli MIAs, but he stressed that the fundamentalist group would not abandon its struggle to drive Israeli troops out of the southern Lebanon security zone.

Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said Hezbollah would make a special effort to locate Ron Arad, the air force captain whose plane was shot down over Lebanon in 1986.

Speaking at a news conference after the completion of Sunday's German-mediated prisoner and body exchange, Nasrallah said the release of 70 more Hezbollah prisoners was linked to Arad's fate.

But while Nasrallah said his group would help locate Arad, he maintained that Hezbollah had long ago lost track of him.

"The last we heard was that in the early days of his captivity, the guards of the room he was held in had to briefly leave," said Nasrallah. "When they returned, they found the door broken and no trace" of Arad.

Israeli sources reportedly expressed doubt that Nasrallah would provide new information on Arad, but they stressed that any new information about his whereabouts would be welcome.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai met Monday with Bernd Schmidbauer, the German official who mediated Sunday's exchange.

He thanked Schmidbauer for his efforts and asked him to continue efforts to secure the return of Israel's three other missing soldiers: Zechariah Baumel, Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz, who were taken prisoner during the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee. Of the four, only Arad is believed to be still alive. □

High Court delays release of pardoned Palestinians

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has temporarily barred the release of two Palestinian women who were pardoned last week by President Ezer Weizman.

A court spokesman said Monday that the release was on hold until later this week, when a three-judge panel will hear a petition against granting the pardons.

The two women were jailed for their involvement in the murders of Israelis.

When Weizman announced the pardons July 18, he said he had made the decision before Israel's May 29 elections, but had postponed the announcement until after the vote at the request of then-Justice Minister David Liba'i.

In October, Weizman refused to shorten the sentences of the two women, saying that he would adhere to an earlier pledge not to free prisoners with Israeli blood on their hands.

The release of the female prisoners was part of a broader plan to release more than 1,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails at the time.

Two other female prisoners were also refused release in October by the military.

The cases of the four female inmates prompted Palestinian officials to charge that Israel was not living up to the terms of the Interim Agreement signed in September in Washington.

More than 20 other female prisoners refused to be set free in October to show their solidarity with the four inmates.

After Weizman made the announcement that he would pardon two of the women, the army said it was considering pardoning the two other Palestinian women, who had been convicted by military courts of murdering Israelis.

If upheld by the High Court of Justice, the pardons would clear the way for the release of all Palestinian women in Israeli jails, including those who had preferred to remain incarcerated to protest the cases of the four women.

In an effort to show that Israel was serious about continuing negotiations with the Palestinians, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned the pardons during his meeting last week in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

That concession, along with Israeli plans to ease the closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, contributed to the generally friendly and optimistic atmosphere that characterized the Netanyahu-Mubarak meeting. □

Israel's new foreign minister to hold first talks with Arafat

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Foreign Minister David Levy and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat are scheduled to meet Tuesday in what will be the highest-level talks so far between the recently elected government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority.

The meeting comes on the heels of Netanyahu's optimistic talks last week in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Both Levy and Arafat are expected to bring a list of demands and complaints to the meeting, which is to take place at the Erez Crossing separating Israel and the Gaza Strip. In addition to presenting their respective positions, the two leaders are likely to reiterate their mutual commitment to the peace process.

"The main purpose of the talks are to get acquainted," Levy said Monday night.

Senior Palestinian officials said Arafat would present Levy with conditions he considered essential to continuing the peace process: full implementation of the Interim Agreement, including the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank town of Hebron; resumption of the final-status negotiations, which commenced in early May; and a freeze on Jewish settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Levy-Arafat meeting is scheduled to be followed by a regional visit by U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross.

Ross is expected to arrive Thursday in Israel on a shuttle mission aimed at advancing peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and Syria.

The head of the Israel Defense Force's intelligence research branch, Brig. Gen. Ya'acov Amidror, reportedly said this week that Syria would "not continue the peace process with Israel if it thinks it will not get the Golan Heights" as part of any future peace agreement.

In a report submitted to the prime minister that assessed the status of peace negotiations after Israel's May 29 elections, Amidror said Arab states believed that the vote indicated that there would be a fundamental change in the assumptions previously guiding the peace negotiations. He wrote that Syria would not return to the negotiating table until it knows in advance that it will get the Golan.

Regarding the Palestinians, Amidror wrote that it is in their interest to continue the negotiations. He also wrote that Israel's developing ties with the rest of the Arab world would be contingent upon the continuation of negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians.

The prime minister's foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, this week visited the Persian Gulf states of Oman and Qatar to reaffirm the Netanyahu government's commitment to the peace process. Earlier this month, Qatar and Oman threatened to halt their ties with Israel if it did not fulfill commitments with the Palestinians signed by the previous Labor government. □

Religious-secular tensions resurface over Jerusalem road

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jerusalem's Bar Ilan Street was the site of confrontations for a second weekend in a row as fervently Orthodox and secular Israeli demonstrators faced off over whether to keep the road open on the Sabbath.

Thousands of haredim, or fervently Orthodox Jews, converged on the street Saturday night, confronting hundreds of protesters participating in a demonstration

organized by the secularist Meretz Party and other organizations.

Both religious and secular groups view the Sabbath closures as indicative of whether life in Jerusalem — and perhaps someday in the whole of the Jewish state — will be governed by religious law.

The continuing clashes occurred as the High Court of Justice reaches a decision on the closing of the street.

Large numbers of police kept the two groups separated Saturday in an effort to prevent serious violence from breaking out.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, who visited the site to assess the situation, was booed by the haredim and did not get out of his car.

The situation escalated when the haredim threw rocks at passing cars. Jerusalem Police Chief Aryeh Amit reportedly said that he, too, was hit with stones.

Police used water cannons and officers on horseback in an effort to control the crowds of haredim.

The scene was a repeat of a similar confrontation that took place the previous weekend.

Knesset member Avraham Ravitz, who had termed the July 13 police treatment of the haredim a "pogrom" and had called for Amit's dismissal, was at the scene Saturday night to witness the confrontation firsthand.

Ravitz, a member of the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism Party, fell ill during the latest clashes and was admitted to a local hospital for observation.

Police charged that haredim threw stones last Friday night at cars traveling along the street and also spread trash and nails on the thoroughfare. Two cars were damaged; two haredim were detained.

Bar Ilan Street, which cuts through fervently Orthodox neighborhoods of Jerusalem, has long been a flashpoint for violent demonstrations.

The battle over the street resurfaced earlier this month when Transport Minister Yitzhak Levy, a member of the National Religious Party, decided that it should be closed during prayers on Shabbat and religious holidays.

Secular groups protested, concerned that the directive would in effect permanently close the street to traffic on the Sabbath and holidays, and that it would set a precedent for closing other streets in the capital in deference to religious observances.

The High Court of Justice subsequently ruled on a petition submitted by left-wing legislators, who cited religious coercion. The court, which temporarily blocked Levy's order and gave the government 15 days to explain why the street should not remain open, is expected to issue its ruling soon. □

Center: Internet provider fuels hate

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — At least 12 groups are promoting white supremacy and hate against minorities through an Internet provider in British Columbia, according to the Canadian representative of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Toronto.

Freedom Site and Skin-Net are two World Wide Web home pages that provide links to the pages of numerous other groups, including some that are connected to the site of Toronto-based Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel, said Sol Littman of the Wiesenthal Center.

Littman said he informed the owner of the British Columbia-based Internet provider that he is not obliged to provide Internet access to hatemongers.

But the owner, Bernard Klatt of the Fairview Technology Centre, has reportedly shown little concern about the issue. "I am aware they are there," he said of the sites. "I probably should go look at them." □

Palestinians say Israeli Arab taken from Jerusalem is free

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli Arab abducted from his eastern Jerusalem home and moved to Ramallah by Palestinian security forces has been released, a Palestinian official reportedly said.

During the weekend, Abed Al-Salam Hirbawi, 50, was arrested in connection with a land dispute with the Coptic Church. He was then taken to the West Bank city of Ramallah.

The Israeli army is checking whether Hirbawi was released, it was reported.

Israel had demanded Hirbawi's release, saying that his arrest was in violation of the Israeli-Palestinian autonomy agreements, which forbid the Palestinian Authority to arrest Israeli citizens or to operate inside Jerusalem.

Israel has repeatedly charged Palestinian security with operating in areas outside its jurisdiction.

Israel, in response to the abduction, sealed off Ramallah and delayed a planned easing of the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip imposed after the first of a string of suicide bombings in February and March.

Israel plans to allow an additional 10,000 Palestinian workers older than 30 into the country. Currently, only 25,000 Palestinians are allowed into the Jewish state.

Hirbawi's family reportedly said that the church was trying to take over a warehouse that the family owns and that is located between the Coptic Convent and Hirbawi's factory in eastern Jerusalem.

In a separate incident, Jewish settlers and Palestinians went head-to-head during the weekend in the West Bank, prompting the Israel Defense Force to impose a curfew on the Arab village of Karyut.

Apparently, Palestinians in the village demonstrated against what they said were attempts by Jews to expand the boundaries of the nearby Shiloh settlement.

Karyut residents said Shiloh settlers took over about 350 acres of their land. The settlers rejected the claims, saying that it was state land that legally belongs to Shiloh.

During the confrontations, settlers injured three Palestinian photographers.

The Palestinians and Jewish settlers threw stones at each other until the IDF broke up the disturbance with tear gas.

A Palestinian human rights group charged that the soldiers let the settlers into the area of the Palestinian demonstration, creating a potentially dangerous situation. The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment further charged that the soldiers merely looked on as the clash took place. □

Murdered Israeli athletes recalled at Coca-Cola exhibit

By Neil Rubin

Atlanta Jewish Times

ATLANTA (JTA) — While the International Olympic Committee has gained unwanted publicity for not recognizing the 1972 murder of Israelis by Palestinian terrorists, Coca-Cola is not glossing over the tragedy.

Inside Coca-Cola Olympic City, a 12-acre attraction for which thousands of visitors a day are spending hours in line, one pavilion offers a history of the Summer Games.

For the 1972 summary, the longest segment — about one minute — covers the abduction and subsequent murder of 11 Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists.

The games were going smoothly "until the tragic morning of Sept. 5," the announcer says. After showing the familiar hooded terrorist peering out the balcony, the piece explains how "after a failed rescue attempt, the remaining hostages died along with the terrorists."

It then mentions a one-day pause in the Games, and that Israelis who were not abducted went home to bury their dead. Moving pictures from Israeli funerals are displayed.

After the Munich clip comes a swimmer and these words: "The star of Munich was American swimmer Mark Spitz, an American Jew." Spitz is then described as "handsome, dark-eyed and powerful."

On a nearby set of television monitors labeled "Nations," visitors can press the area of the Middle East on the world map and then hit "Israel."

The next screen has details of the country, such as its history of Olympics participation and population. The screen shows an area of 7,847 square miles that does not include the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights.

There is no listing for "Palestine," the designation given to the Palestinian team from areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

The team was allowed by the International Olympic Committee to march with a "Palestine" banner and carry the Palestinian flag in the opening ceremonies last Friday. □

Teacher seminar in Lithuania to promote Holocaust study

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two Holocaust educators will travel to Lithuania this fall to head a seminar for high school teachers in an attempt to introduce Holocaust education there.

The B'nai B'rith-sponsored educators, Shalmi Barmore, former director of education at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and Judith Shapiro of Philadelphia, had met with Lithuanian Minister of Education Vladislavas Domarkas and other top education officials on their recent trip to the Baltic country.

As a result of that meeting, the educators will return to Lithuania this fall to share their expertise with their counterparts in the former Soviet republic.

The program will be co-sponsored by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, B'nai B'rith and the Rich Foundation in Paris.

"I was encouraged by the Lithuanians' interest in the subject," Shapiro said. "The Lithuanians wanted to know the historic truth about the Holocaust. They wanted to know their role and they want to teach it."

Some 94 percent of Lithuania's Jewish population, which totaled 200,000 to 250,000 people before the war, was killed during World War II. About 6,000 Jews now live in Lithuania, mostly in Vilnius and Kaunas.

Scheduled for the five-day conference is instruction on Jewish history, Holocaust education and the history of Lithuanian Jewry. Also planned is a trip to a Holocaust site, possibly to the Vilna Ghetto and the Paneiri Forest, where thousands of Jews were killed in 1941.

"Two generations of Lithuanians have been raised with this blind spot in history," said Daniel Mariaschin, director of B'nai B'rith's Center for Public Policy.

They "have no idea that there was a major Jewish community in Lithuania for hundreds and hundreds of years" and their history books are "tainted by political bias," he said. He added that the curriculum is intended to "to educate Lithuanians to understand their own history" and to create a "living memorial, a way of remembering those who died there as well." □